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Media Wars: Mediatization, populism and media reform in Rafael Correa's Ecuador

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Manel Palos Pons

Committee in charge:

Professor Daniel C. Hallin, Chair
Professor Alexander Leor Fattal
Professor Robert B. Horwitz
Professor Nancy Grey Postero
Professor Thomas Rainer Schmidt

2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

To Sofia, my love. We crossed a line with our old friend Nina, and we discovered a life with Olivia and Matias. All this, including my dissertation, was possible because of you. Gracias Sofi, tú eres la raíz de todo esto.

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VITA

- 2001 Bachelor of Arts/Science in Political Science, Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- 2003 Bachelor of Arts/Science in Sociology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- 2005 Master of Arts in Journalism, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid/Diario El País
- 2014 Master of Arts in Political Science, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
- 2016-2018 Teaching Assistant, University of California San Diego
- 2018-2022 Writing Instructor, Culture, Art, and Technology program at Sixth College, University of California, San Diego
- 2019-2021 Lecturer, Department of Communication, University of California San Diego
- 2022 Doctor of Philosophy in Communication, University of California San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Media Wars: Mediatization, populism and media reform in Rafael Correa's Ecuador

by

Manel Palos Pons

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Daniel C. Hallin, Chair

Engaging multimodal ethnographic work and content analysis methods, my dissertation examines how populism emerges and endures in a particular media and

institutional environment, how journalism and populism's relationship presents a conflictive and symbiotic logic, and how the experience of media policy under these circumstances demands a re-evaluation of how we think the role of the state and the law in producing the institutions and practices necessary for independent and democratic journalism to thrive.

More specifically, my study focuses on the intersection of the mediatization of politics and populism in Ecuador around Rafael Correa's presidency (2007-2017), a critical case to understand processes of media and politics transformation from a Global South perspective. Correa's era was marked by one of the boldest media reforms in Latin America and the severe clash between mainstream media and the populist government. My analysis shows how a persistent institutional instability between the fields of politics and journalism shapes the struggle to settle a diverse, democratic, and plural public sphere.

My findings highlight, first, that the Ecuadorean case clearly challenges the analytical distinction between media and political logics, since in Ecuador we observe how a populist actor (Correa and his allies) is not only able to adopt media logic's core features, but also to use them to support a political and legislative agenda with outcomes affecting the media logic itself. These ambiguous delimitations contribute critically to feed a conflictive (although productive) relationship between media and populism. In this context, secondly, and after Correa implemented a deep media reform, journalistic professionalism increased; this is confirmed by in-depth interviews with journalists, and by the content analysis of the most read national newspapers. Once Correa left the presidency, private and public media alike aligned with the government, and levels of critical journalism, pluralism and diversity decreased. Finally, these findings critically modify how we think the role of the state in

enabling the institutions and practices necessary for independent and democratic news media to progress. Usually, main narratives about the emergence of the independent press focus on the rise of a professionalized media market, circumventing the position of the state; the Ecuadorean case requires a re-evaluation of the role of the state over the birth of an autonomous journalistic field able to protect and spread democratic, inclusive, and pluralist values.

Introduction

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.
(*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Karl Marx. 1852)

Y en eso nos hallamos. Labrando un futuro, tras haber limpiado a nuestra historia de un pasado vergonzoso.¹
(*El cuento de la patria*. Benjamín Carrión. 1967)

Nothing and all. From 0 to 100 in less than 6 years. This is what I saw before anything else. Ecuador hastily passed from being a deregulated commercial media environment in 2007, to establishing itself as one of the most regulated and intervened media systems in the Americas in 2013. How could it be possible? What happened in this country for this huge transformation to take place in such a short lapse of time? Rafael Correa's rule, supported by his newly formed party, Alianza Pais, which dominated Ecuadorian politics for more than 10 years, could be an obvious answer. Furthermore, notwithstanding the emergence of a new and powerful political actor, any analyst should add Correa's first disruptive measure, calling the nation to a new constituent process shortly after his victory in the 2006 election, which produced the 2008 Montecristi Constitution, one of the longest constitutional texts in the Americas. Finally, the analyst should not forget to take into account the rising oil prices during Correa's presidency, flooding the government's budget with unprecedented spending capacity. But were those factors (political, legal-institutional, economic) enough for a full understanding of Ecuador's media system transfiguration?

¹ "And with the aim of seeking a civilian citizen to serve as a bridge for the transition to the rule of law, a Constituent Assembly was convened, in which all the hopes of my people are deposited. And that is where we find ourselves. Building a future, after having cleansed our history of a shameful past".

At first, I was tempted, even pushed, to approach Ecuador's transformation using those clear cut although broad factors, and I was especially impressed with the spectacular combination between the new political actor with a comprehensive constitutional re-foundation of the country even provoking what Correa and his followers called a *Revolución Ciudadana*. Many of my informants also supported this vision: for the first time in Ecuadorian history, real change was happening, and the transformation of the media environment was just another necessary milestone pursuing the *Buen Vivir* philosophy (the Good Living) or *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua, a concept introduced during Correa's first years to insert a distinct national (and Latin American) goal, other than just economic development, or a profitmaking-centered society. Before traveling to Ecuador, I was impacted by this vision and by Rafael Correa's own consistent, almost self-evident, explanations about his country's transformation disseminated throughout international media, which gained global notoriety especially after the Ecuadorian Embassy headquarters in London granted asylum to Wikileaks' founder Julian Assange in 2012. This was a kind of revolution; and those deep reforms plus Assange's case were confirming the critical dimension that media played amidst this exciting metamorphosis.

In addition to that, the populist style embodied by Correa, reflecting the populism's momentum around the globe with Donald Trump's presidency or the Brexit process in the UK, presented a pioneering full experience with populism, since the Ecuadorean case preceded those events, offering at the same many dimensions that could be mirrored in other cases. What was happening in Quito and Guayaquil up to 2017 was special, new, a manifestation of something singular to our present historical situation. Could it be that the

main factor for this case was populism and that the Latin American innovation around this phenomenon could work as a sort of starting point of a more general global process with direct effects on media? What I read, listened to, and watched especially before my fieldwork in Quito and Guayaquil in 2017 had much to do with those questions and ideas.

Yet, once I set foot in the Andean country, and especially after interviewing a plurality of subjects in Ecuador's two major cities and participating in a number of events (from daily life issues to academic seminars and small adventures with local citizens in the amazing Andean natural environment, among other experiences) my perspective changed. Not too much though. I was not expecting to see a revolutionary paradise when I landed in Quito's international airport, 20 miles from the city center. My years working as an editor in Mexico prevented me (and informed me about) accumulating too many expectations about the country. Clearly I had collected all those ideas about Ecuador and the political phenomenon (Correa, basically) before I visited the nation, but I knew well enough a key Latin American country with allegedly "revolutionary" experiences (in my case the EZLN's revolt in Chiapas marked my adolescence and political education in Spain) and its contrasts with the dramatic reality, visible in the highest income inequality and in the deep-rooted racism, not to feel disappointed when facing the facts. Ecuador was a developing country in 2017, with some similarities with other developing nations, although in this case –I was trying to support it, although sometimes it was not easy to maintain it–, the government was a leftist one, and apparently was actually advocating for real change, and some sort of, at least, Keynesian policies, investing in education, health or infrastructure, and trying, with all its limitations, to change a dysfunctional and perverse media system.

In any case, my overall perception about the extraordinary nature of the case was then put in question, although, I believe, it could be mostly a mere adaptation to real world conditions, nuanced by my previous experiences. Moreover, I quickly learnt that, in clear contrast with the Mexican political system, the Ecuadorian case was more dynamic, up to the point to providing some room for bloodless constituent moments in which, as the core definition of the concept says, reality is suspended and the sovereign people (or the community) triggers an “absolute procedure” (Negri, 1999) to discuss how everything must be distributed, regulated, constituted. Summing up, I kept that sensation of dynamism and flexibility alongside with a deep impression of how complex developing a country could be, even when resources and ideas are apparently by the side of the rulers’ aims.

Furthermore, the ‘rediscovery’ of the importance of a relatively autonomous and efficient state to develop a country –and creating the bases for middle classes, public goods or social services, infrastructure, education, healthcare, etc.–, ingrained intensely in me after my years in Mexico, was revisited when I started to work on the Ecuadorian case. Actually, I felt that the state was widely more present in Ecuador than in Mexico, particularly comparing Quito with Mexico City. Just the sight of the relatively low number of people working in informal jobs in Quito’s historical old town (a World heritage site since 1978) gave me an idea, besides the existence of public broadcasters or a number of newly created public institutions, visible in the streets and in the conversations. So, I would have to confirm that, in some way, the extraordinary, the *événement* in Braudelian terms, was partially confirmed, although in its particular context, which added some skepticism of a too ‘heroic’ or ‘exceptional’ view of Correa’s ruling years.

However, I came back to the country in the summer of 2018 and many things had changed. Lenin Moreno had been the president of the Republic for almost a year and a half, and Correa's legacy was bitterly being disputed. To begin with, many of my interviewees were concerned. "Things are getting bad", "the government is wrong", "we are going back to the past", were recurrent topics in my conversations with people close to Correa's positions or more progressive informants (even if very distant from the "later Correa", according to them). Other participants, especially those working in the traditional private media, showed off more optimistic views, although with some caveats. "I'm afraid that the sweep goes too further, and that the other people are not allowed to speak; this could lead to an important, historical, *vendetta*", responded Luis Vivanco, founder of *La Posta*, an online news and entertaining medium extremely critical of Correa, when I visited him at his headquarters, in the central Avenida Amazonas, right next to an insurance company. Vivanco was expressing, cautiously, his concerns about a strong repression of former Correa allies in the country, marginalized by mainstream media, and the reaction to this, as if politics in Ecuador was drawing a pendulum motion. Some days before, at the other side of the huge Carolina park, in Avenida Los Shyris, Orlando Perez, host of one of the most popular political shows in Telesur and former director of the state-owned newspaper *El Telegrafo*, shared a coffee with croissants with me at a fancy French style cafeteria. "First, I think Moreno represents sectors dissenting with Correa. Secondly, the same Correa was not able to control in some way or another Moreno's government; I suspect that he tried to situate some ministers to control the government, to continue with his legacy, and he couldn't. And third, and this one is the boldest: I think that Moreno was coopted by another sector, which

can be the Right or the United States Embassy. People from the left dissatisfied with Correa are not at ease with Moreno either”, elaborated Perez in a long conversation. In any case, one perspective was universal to all those interviewed in this second round of conversations: almost nobody expected Lenin Moreno’s turnaround, and many were struggling to understand what was hidden in that sudden alteration.

I have to say that after this second fieldwork I became even more interested in the Ecuadorian case. There was something more than those partially differentiated changes mentioned above, or at least there was something I was missing in my contextualization of Correa’s Ecuador during my first visit, along with my few readings and connections with the country before travelling in there. Actually, I believe that it was Moreno’s odd reaction that triggered my curiosity to fully understand what was happening. Since that moment, my thinking revolved around the question of what (and where) was the normality and what was the abnormality of the Ecuadorian case; what was the structurally consistent trend, inserted in a *longue durée* view of the case (Braudel, 1958), and what was providing the *événement*, the extraordinary, the short-term view: Correa or Moreno? Or both of them? Was Correa a new path in Ecuadorian history or a path consistent with the previous Ecuadorian history? Was Moreno, in contrast, the logical resolution, taking away Correa’s odd phenomenon back to normality? Or did both interpretations make sense, even if they were reflecting two apparently opposite directions? As the reader will see in this study, Ecuador’s recent history is not free of unexpected twists and bold political adventures and in this context the quotes that introduce these pages got their meaning from that paradoxical nature of the change in Ecuador. The past was present “as a nightmare” as Marx famously put it, but this confirmed

with Moreno in power, highlighted that Correa's presidency actually was something extraordinary, distinct or transformative, as the second quote, taken from Carrion's *El Cuento de la Patria*, the reference book during Correa's campaign in 2006, points out.

In any case, at first glance, the history of Ecuadorean media system until 2005, right when Correa's name started to appear in the news, was not so different from that of many Latin American countries. Almost all media had been privately owned since their inception, their aim had been primarily commercial and their relationship with public authorities and economic elites had been 'problematic', or as some authors put it, media in Latin America were attached to specific interests forming a sort of "media patrimonialism" (Segura & Waisbord, 2016). This picture, obviously, does not match many media models proposed for a Western world that excludes Latin America. Hallin and Mancini's three media systems (2004), –that is to say, Liberal or Anglo-Saxon model, Corporatist-Democratic or Nordic media system, and Pluralist Polarized or Mediterranean model–, did not incorporate cases outside Europe and the United States. However, and following a cultural and historical affinity, there may be justification or temptation to relate Latin American cases to Polarized Pluralist systems (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002), such as Spain, Italy, Greece or even France, defined by high levels of political parallelism between media and ideological stances, mild levels of professionalization and a savage deregulation. I partially contest this approach in this research and, as the reader will see in the following chapters, if there were some similarities between Ecuador and Southern Europe they occurred under specific circumstances once Correa was in power, but not before. In that regard, I frame Latin American cases as distinctive media systems, due to many structural differences with other

regions and states. Actually, the characterization of a Latin American media system or classification of Latin American media systems is a pending task and a promising research field that this specific study would like to contribute to as well. Probably some features of the Ecuadorian case would help us to elaborate such characterization and a more Latin American based typology.

Actually, Ecuador before Correa shared some features with Pluralist Polarized media systems, such as the opaque relations between the state and private interests, or the traditional Catholic influence on the public sphere, but it also matched the overwhelming commercialism associated to the American liberal media systems. Furthermore, Ecuador showed *sui generis* features that Manuel Alejandro Guerrero and Mireya Márquez-Ramírez (2014) have summarized in the concept ‘Liberal-Captured media systems’, a situation in which a liberal façade covers the material capture of the press by economic and political elites for their particular interests, undermining key values for journalism, such as journalism’s autonomy, professional principles and practices, or a public service orientation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 32-33). These combinations of features, which will be further elaborated in the following pages, changed while Correa, a full populist leader, was ruling the country, but they had been dominating Ecuador’s media system for years. Even with other so-called populist leaders in power, such as the ubiquitous Jose María Velasco-Ibarra between the 1940s and 1960s, Abdalá Bucaram’s brief presidency in 1996, or Lucio Gutiérrez between 2002 and 2005, trends of that complex ‘captured’ situation were firmly ingrained in the Ecuadorean media environment.

In sum, we will use this introductory chapter to provide some historical context of the media –which in this study are considered basically ‘news media’ and directly related to journalism– that Correa encountered when he accepted the position of Minister of Economy in 2005, (he resigned after three months) and became later the successful populist candidate in 2006. Whether the situation was the same once Correa left office is another question to which this study will also respond to, especially in the last chapter. Here, nonetheless, we will deal with history *before* Correa, besides presenting the path and main arguments tackled by this research. This introduction hence will elaborate on that historical context, especially around the 25 years that preceded Correa, to lead to a detailed explanation of the methods, main research questions, findings and arguments proposed by this study. As we will see, the Ecuadorean case speaks about a complex media transformation, or even revolution, strongly differentiated from the previous history, which shows: 1) how populism emerges and endures in a particular media and institutional environment, 2) how journalism and core aspects of the media logic introduce a conflictive but productive relationship with populism and vice versa, and 3) how the experience of media policy under Correa demands a re-assessment in the way we think (and situate) the role of the state and the law in producing the institutions and practices necessary for independent and democratic journalism to emerge and flourish. These theses could even be concentrated into two big arguments that structure this study: a) journalism and populism can’t be understood as two differentiated worlds and they create a peculiar symbiosis in the Ecuadorean case, and b) polarization *and* professionalization of journalism under Correa made the Ecuadorean public sphere more diverse, open and plural than ever, critically disrupting hegemonic assumptions about the

factual and ideal relationship between the state and news media. Of course, the sequence to reach to these conclusions is complicated and needs elaboration. In the following pages the past predating Correa and his peculiar media revolution will be observed, aiming to situate Correa's change, and the broad meaning of this transformation. This is the first step of the story.

1.- Ecuadorean media's origins: Tradition, elite partisanship and commercialism

Observing the available literature and archives around the Ecuadorean case², and following a broad understanding of the media system definition and historical development (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hallin, 2015) we can conclude that Ecuador shares, especially in the distant past, some traits with two European countries, Spain and France. Next, a major influence of the United States by the late Nineteenth century and the Twentieth century, shaped critically that continental imprint. Yet the model of primitive journalism in Ecuador, some decades before gaining the independence from Spain in the 1820s, was adapted directly from the Spanish Enlightenment, which, in turn reflected a version of the French *Lumières*. *Primicias de la Cultura de Quito*, founded in 1792, was the first proto-newspaper (Ayala

² A mix of historical, political science and journalism studies has been used to illustrate the specificities of the Ecuadorian case following a historical long-term approach. Enrique Ayala Mora's paper on Ecuador's journalism history, a unique academic proposal in the field (there are not much available resources on the subject), plays an important role about the knowledge on the origins of Ecuadorian journalism. George Blanksten's (1951) and George Lauderbaugh's (2012) books provided the basic backbone for the historical approach, both of them mostly centered on political science scholarship. De la Torre's multidisciplinary perspective (2010; 2015) contributed with heuristic clues, very useful for our purposes to situate Correa, especially in De la Torre's strategy on dealing with Ecuadorian populist figures as Velasco Ibarra and Rafael Correa himself. Other references will play a major role depending on the section.

Mora, 2012: 5) of the Real Audiencia de Quito³, (which would constitute the bulk of the Ecuadorian nation-state) and borrowed much of its structure, scope and content from ‘Sociedades Patrióticas de Amigos del País’, or those clubs of enlightened elites, which adopted new ideas traveling mostly from France towards Spain and its colonies. Another feature imported from (or imposed by) Spain was the dominant Catholicism (Schwaller, 2011), a highly institutionalized religion, that would be constantly present, merged with the concept of the nation-state in Ecuador⁴ and Latin America.

1.1.- The press

The first Ecuadorian newspaper, *El Patriota de Guayaquil* was launched at the coastal capital with an evident liberal tone in 1821 (although never absent of Catholic faith) and, in contrast to the enlightened and educational *Primicias*, it included news and

³ The economic and political importance of the *Real Audiencia de Quito*, which is very well reflected in its outstanding old city center, a World Heritage Site since 1978, must be highlighted at this point to fully understand the existence of publications (and clubs or associations of *ilustrados*) such as *Primicias*. A rich province of the Spanish American Colonies, Real Audiencia de Quito was *de facto* autonomous from the Viceroy of Peru, first, and the Viceroy of New Grenada, later, enabling Quito to develop as a veritable urban center gathering dynamic elites and dissenting ideas in the late Eighteenth century (Phelan, 1967), intertwined with the unavoidable Catholic influence.

⁴ Catholicism is indeed merged with the foundational myths of the country. One just has to pay a visit to the Cathedral, the Church-Convent of San Francisco, the Centro Cultural Metropolitano or the Museum of Colonial History to realize the critical role played by Catholicism in the history of the country. Huge baroque constructions, full of golden decorations and suffering statues of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary are accompanied with Hernando de la Cruz’s colorful gruesome images of hell. Jesuits, of course, have their own headquarters in Quito’s city center too, at Church of la Compañía de Jesús, showing some eclectic displays in the profusely ornamentation of the place, drawing from Indigenous influences. But it is the Cathedral what truly catches the attention on issues related to Ecuador’s nationalism and independence. The memory of *Libertador* Antonio José de Sucre is well alive in his decorated crypt, and it is impressive to see how several countries, from Castro’s Cuba to Uribe’s Colombia or Chavez’s Venezuela, have paid their respects at the tomb of one of Simón Bolívar’s closest collaborators with commemorative plaques. Also, the first declaration of Ecuador’s independence was performed in San Agustín Monastery’s chapter hall. The Ecuadorian-South American nation was born fully Catholic, forming what the Mexican-Ecuadorian author Bolívar Echevarría called a “Latin American Baroque Ethos” (Echevarría, 1990).

information from distant regions within the country and from foreign nations, besides the opinion pieces. *El Patriota*, which was attacked, shaken and eventually closed due to the political and economic tensions among the elites in Guayaquil (Ayala Mora, 2012: 6) unveiled the path for the press in the country throughout the following decades. Actually, the Ecuadorian press of the Nineteenth century was a “combat press” (Ayala Mora, 2012: 6-12), portraying enmities between the conservative, agrarian, landowners’ elites from the Sierra, and the liberal, trade-oriented bourgeoisie emerging at the Coast and other parts of the country. The *Oriente* province at the Amazon stayed basically as an unexplored territory until the mid-20th century (Blanksten, 1951: 25-26), and natives from those lands (as well as peoples from remote Andean regions) were excluded from the nation building process, which incorporated a very limited percentage of the country’s real population.

Most of the Ecuadorian newspapers in the Nineteenth century did not have a commercial purpose, however. It was mostly an elite partisan press, similar in some ways to those politicized journals in other parts of the world, from the more popular Jacksonian partisan press in the United States (Schudson, 2003), to the notable-parties’ press in Spain or France (Seoane, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 83-127). All in all, the limited Ecuadorian public sphere tended to represent liberal views (more pro free-trade economic policies, more flexible towards religious dogmas and mostly against the confessional definition of the state) and conservative voices (pro protectionist policies and advocating stricter morality, and fully support for Catholic Church). The case of *El Filantropo*, edited in the 1850s and 1860s in Guayaquil represented a weak emerging proletariat in a country that by the late Nineteenth century was almost alien to global markets.

However, Ecuador's economic integration into the world economy changed with the liberal revolution led by General Eloy Alfaro, also producing mutations in the press. This period, or *Transformación Liberal*, during the first decades of the Twentieth century, was marked with the creation of the first commercial press. And although the first commercial paper, *Diario de Guayaquil*, appeared in the pacific capital in 1860, the crystallization of a viable commercial press came much later and with limitations. Actually, the first daily newspaper was *La Nación*, founded in 1881 also in Guayaquil, but it disappeared in 1906 (Ayala Mora, 2012: 14). Another major newspaper, *El Telégrafo*, was also founded in Guayaquil in 1884 and performed as a respectable commercial paper for decades, even though its leadership in the press market decreased in the final years of the Twentieth century⁵. This new commercial press presented some specificities. First of all, it was not professionalized, and although many new technical positions were required (typographers, linothipists, photographers, designers, accountants, etc.) the position of journalists was vague, and politicians, writers or just educated persons did the job without too much in the way of professional norms (Ayala Mora, 2012: 9-10). Moreover, the organization of newspapers was not fully clear, and there was not an established distribution of sections and genres; extracts of novels or poems, coexisted with local news, opinion pieces and pharmaceutical advertisements.

1.2.- Radio and television broadcasting

⁵ In 2008, Rafael Correa's first government ordered the nationalization of that Company that controlled *El Telégrafo* as a payment for the owners' debts with the state.

The introduction of new technologies such as the radio and cinema, first, and television, later, transformed further the Ecuadorian media system and consequently the structure of the nation's public sphere in the first half of the Twentieth century. Also, the impact and development of those technological changes was accompanied by broader societal, economic and political changes in those decades. For instance, a limited labor movement, created around export-oriented agriculture (progressively specialized around the Banana business) and textile industries, started to emerge, although much of the country's masses stayed in informal or temporary jobs or under almost feudal forms of labor organization (Milk, 1997: 37-58). The Ecuadorian Socialist Party was founded in 1926, and a Stalinist-inspired Ecuador Communist Party appeared after a schism with the former in 1931 (Ayala Mora, 2012: 21). The first edition of *La Tierra*, the nation's first newspaper born out of a specific political party with some popular base, was launched in 1933, but disappeared in the following decade. In the same context, the first radio station, *El Pardo*, was established at Riobamba, a regional transport center in the country, in 1929. With few listeners at the beginning, the lowering cost of the technology, following the massive introduction of transistors radios, triggered radio's use throughout the nation, making this media one of the most used, especially in local communities.

In those same years, Ecuador's economy was thriving, especially during the World War II (Acosta, 2002: 93-105). That economic growth, and the relative weight of an emerging working class, combined with a large informal and precarious sector and still prevalent feudal structures, contrasted with a conflictive although elitist political life with an extremely narrow electoral base (almost 90% of the population was excluded from the

electoral process). In that context, De la Torre (2010: 30) highlights the “Revolución Gloriosa” of May 28, 1944, as the introduction of “mass politics in Ecuador”, although serious limitations remained in terms of popular representation in the political system⁶. However, from that moment, José María Velasco Ibarra, the first Ecuadorian leader to be called a ‘populist’, started to dominate the difficult relationship between conservative, liberal and socialist fractions, first assuming a progressive Constitution in 1945, and next proclaiming, just some months later, a more restrictive supreme charter in 1946. Velasco was expelled from government in 1947 by a military coup, but he returned to power on a number of occasions: in 1952-1956, 1960-61 and 1968-1972. Only completing a full term once, Velasco Ibarra was nicknamed as “The Great Absentee”.

This special situation had its reflection in the Ecuadorian media system. The 1945 Constitution addressed press freedom and freedom of speech among other communication issues for the first time, and instituted a bolder vision of journalism and communication in the country. Article 10 guaranteed speech, opinion and press freedom, aside from personal offenses, calumnies and amoral manifestations. Furthermore, the Constitution promised to regulate the profession of journalism “considering that (this profession) has the primordial aim of the defense of national interests and constitutes a social service deserving respect and support from the state”. The provision also highlighted that the law “will establish the means to render effective journalists’ responsibilities” and settled that “no authority may suspend or close newspapers nor, due to press offences, hijack printing-presses nor seize

⁶ It is important to highlight that the introduction of mass politics in Ecuador was quite partial, as it was not followed by a massive participation in elections. According to Pyne (1961), registered voters in 1948 represented 16.16% of the population; that number went up to 22.44% in the 1960 general elections.

publications”. The Constitution, finally, introduced, for the first time, the citizens’ “right to reply” for free in any media if they were the subject of an offensive comment or incorrect information. This progressive Constitution was preceded by the creation in 1940 of the first journalists’ association in the country, the Unión Nacional de Periodistas. However, the experiment of 1945 lasted only a few months, as Velasco Ibarra, pressed by conservative forces, urged the passing of another Constitution in 1946, suspending the progressive spirit of 1945 which, however, would remain alive for decades⁷.

As is perfectly known, the years after the World War II were followed by a wide economic growth triggered by public programs and Keynesian policies in the Global North, with an international political scene marked by the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In that context, most Latin American nations were implementing import-substitution policies (Prébisich, 1950; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979) as the right path to industrialization or modernization. Ecuador was not an exception, although it reached mild outcomes far from the efforts (and results) put into effect in countries such as Mexico, Argentina or Brazil (Acosta, 2002: 111). In addition to that, the discovery of productive oil fields in the Amazon in the 1960s added a new key variable to the Ecuadorian economy.

In those circumstances, states extended their influence also to the public sphere and took an active role in media policy. For some authors, it was a veritable “paradigm change” (van Cuilenburg, J.J. & McQuail, D., 2003; Pickard, 2017), that assumed a ‘positive freedom’ or *egalitarian* approach towards press freedom and journalism, questioning *laissez*

⁷ The struggle between an ‘ideal’ constitution of 1945 and the successive constitutions of 1946, 1967, 1978 and 1998 has been a recurrent topic in the constitutional discussions in Ecuador (Moncayo, 2008) until very recently. Progressive governments (military juntas, mostly) proclaimed their adhesion to the 1945 Constitution, whereas, conservative governments took their inspiration in the 1946 Constitution, or the current legal codes.

faire policies regarding mass media, established[?] in some liberal societies before the war, as we will discuss later in this research. The creation of television was actually a public endeavor in most of developed nations after the war, deployed through public broadcasters, with the exception of the United States, where, on the other hand, provisions and regulations were designed to monitor the three national television broadcasters in the so-called ‘network era’.

Mass media was hence critically transformed in this complex context of state expansion, but the reflection of this global policy was quite limited in Ecuador. Populist Velasco Ibarra created in 1961 the first public broadcaster in the country, the *Radio Nacional del Ecuador*, but almost all radio stations, with a reach and spread amplified exponentially with the creation of the transistor radio, were private. Also, the launch of television broadcasting was totally a private business without much government or public intervention. As happened to radio, it was a venture nourished by imported technologies from the United States, Germany and France and, as with the press, it was initiated in Guayaquil, in the industrial coastal economic capital. The Zambrano-Rosenbaum family got the first license of a project that was largely improvised and scarcely regulated (Mora, 1982) after its first broadcasting in 1960. Basically, the model echoed the American system of the network era, in which commercial broadcasters were granted licenses by the government, preserving some television slots for public interest shows and educational programs, although the implementation of those goals and plans was more than doubtful in the Ecuadorean case.

1.3.- First alternative media actors and regulations

The 1960s also saw the introduction of other interesting actors in Ecuador's changing media system, although far from television in terms of power influence. The Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina, or Ciespal, was founded on October the 8th 1959 as an international institution supported by the United Nations, the Ecuadorian government, and Ecuador's Central University, the oldest higher education institution of the country, and state-owned⁸. Ciespal, designed as a space for research and training, played a special role in the history of Ecuador's media system. It focused on journalism training, at least in its first decade (León Duarte, 2012), especially by supporting the creation of communication and journalism departments in universities throughout Latin America. Later, in the 1970s, Ciespal turned into a more theoretical and empirical research institution, with a special focus on documentation and data collection. In 1972 the journal *Chasqui* ('messenger', in Quechua) was founded, providing a new tool for academic investigation and general reflection on communication and journalism issues in the region.

Additionally, another important institution added to Ecuador's media system in the 1960s and 1970s were community media. First associated with Catholic radio stations in secluded areas, mostly indigenous and Quechua speaking, they crystallized in Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares de Ecuador (ERPE) in 1962 (Sanmartin et al, 2017) with a goal of "awakening of indigenous peoples" (Astudillo, 2009), through literacy and evangelization campaigns closely attached to Liberation Theology's aims and values. There are few studies, data or accurate information about this field in its beginnings; the only exception to that

⁸ More basic information at Ciespal's webpage <https://ciespal.org/historia>

norm is probably a short work by Martha Dubravcic (2002), where the beginnings of Centro de Educación Popular (CEDEP) in the early 1970s are analyzed, linking its inception with agrarian and urban unions CEDOC and FENOC, and exploring its role in triggering a number of community media in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, CEDEP was behind of the creation of media such as *La Luna* radio in the 1990s, a key influence in the fall of former presidents Jamil Mahuad and Lucio Gutiérrez in 2000 and 2005, respectively. Dubravcic also mentions Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (ALER), a Panamerican and Ecuadorian institution created in 1972 in Quito and inspired by Liberation Theology and leftist militants animated by antiimperialist theories.

Finally, and eventually connected with the widely shared enthusiasm for state intervention, there was also a period, in the 1970s, in which the military Junta in power tried explicitly to regulate media and journalism. The Law on the Professional Practice of Journalism, the first of its genre in Ecuador, was passed in 1975 under the Junta, and it established specific behaviors, norms (such as the requirement of college degrees to be employed as a journalist) and practices, besides setting mandatory membership for any journalist in the newly created Federación Nacional de Periodistas del Ecuador (Fedape). The Radio and Television Broadcasting Law was also sanctioned the same year by the dictatorship, tackling, for the first time, the role of the state in a more structured media environment (and market) in the country, especially regarding radio and television frequencies and licenses. Three years later, in 1978, a Professional Ethics Code was approved by the Fedape, addressing the profession's accountability *vis à vis* the community, the state, professional practice and international relations. However, this role of the state,

which dramatically increased at the end of the 1970s, was obviously authoritarian –although Military Juntas were self-defined as progressive, especially in their economic policies– unevenly applied in a country which a persistent fragmented society, and lasted very little, since Ecuador’s political configuration was changed, quite radically, with the adoption of the first fully democratic constitution in 1979.

2.- The ‘Neoliberal turn’ before Correa: *sui generis* liberalization and concentration

After eight years of authoritarian rule, Ecuador finally was turned into a formal liberal democracy with a referendum in 1978 and a new constitution in 1979. It was a complex process, monitored by the military. Presidential elections were celebrated between 1978 and 1979, and center-left President Jaime Roldós was elected. Roldós died in a plane accident in 1981, but his presidency continued with Osvaldo Hurtado, his former vice-president, in charge until 1984. In some way, Roldós’ and Hurtado’s were transitional administrations travelling from interventionist governments, challenged by a complex international context, to the new waters of neoliberalism, championed by Reagan and Thatcher, and already activated in the region by Pinochet’s Chile.

Conservative president Leon Febres Cordero was, actually, (1984-1988) “the first democratically elected Latin American leader to implement neoliberal economic programs” (Lauderbaugh, 2012: 138), and he did, certainly, follow Reagan’s example and “access[ed] 319 million dollars in loans from the US government” (Lauderbaugh, 139) during his first year. Febres Cordero, a member of Partido Social Cristiano, who had a difficult relationship

with media, including direct harassment of journalists⁹, succeeded in imposing some of his policies against a number of adversaries, from trade unions to other political parties, or social movements. At the end of Cordero's term, the economic situation was far worse than before: "the Sucre had lost 75% of its value, unemployment and underemployment were on the rise and the foreign debt exceeded 10 billion dollars" (Lauderbaugh, 139).

Rodrigo Borja, a self-defined social democrat from Izquierda Democrática party, won the next presidential elections in 1988, promising to curb the market's abuses, but he quickly reversed those electoral pledges and acceded to a loan with the International Monetary Fund amounting to 271 million between 1989 and 1991 (Lauderbaugh, 140). Sixto Durán, the following president, a conservative, stressed those neoliberal policies, actually adopting a financial liberalization that initiated a 'boom and bust' cycle (Jácome, 2004) that dramatically led to the 1999 financial crash, the so-called *Feriado Bancario*, Ecuador's worst modern economic crisis, which also triggered the adoption of the US dollar as the national currency.

For the Ecuadorian media, the return of democracy meant the almost complete removal of state censorship and the virtual suspension of legislation addressing media and

⁹ Febres Cordero's problematic relationships with news media are expressed, for instance, in a report issued by Flasco and funded by the Dutch government through foreign aid (Messina, 2004). Additionally, Cordero was mentioned in some interviews with informants on the field, especially in a conversation with Raquel Escobar, from Radio Pública del Ecuador, recalling Febres' aggressive interaction with *Hoy* newspaper and highlighting some similarities between Correa and Cordero: "Febres Cordero wanted to shut down 37 media in the country, he persecuted journalists, insulted media, practiced censorship. . . There wasn't a Communication Law but a National Security Law, and within that law, an emergency decree, and (through) that decree (they) blocked media. . . I think the highest conflict between the government and the media can be found in Febres Cordero's and Rafael Correa's administrations, two politicians that ideologically are very distant. In both moments you have media which are collaborating or confronting; with Febres you have *El Comercio* and *El Universo* collaborating and *Hoy* confronting; during Correa's presidency, in contrast, *El Comercio* and *El Universo* are opposed to him and only *El Telégrafo*, which is a state-owned newspaper, is supportive".

journalism passed during the dictatorship, although no law was explicitly repealed. New newspapers were founded, such as *Hoy*, –the first one completely created and managed with computers– in 1982 in Quito. Other media companies gained more strength, such as Granasa, the publisher for *Expreso* (founded in 1973) and *Extra* (created in 1974). The former was transformed into the most widely sold and nationally distributed newspaper, acting, at the same time, as Ecuador’s only sensationalist journal, using a very similar content and style as Mexican or Peruvian *Nota Roja* publications.

Although there are not data available to support such a claim, commercialization must have increased, and perhaps exponentially, in the first years of the 1980s. Positive economic growth from the 70s until 1983 and the incorporation of most of the country’s population to the political process for the first time (illiteracy was no longer a handicap for citizenship rights in the 1979 Constitution) probably bolstered media markets. Another different story is the correlation between the long recession suffered from 1984 to 1990, unstable democratization and media markets. Concentration and limited expansion, besides labor cuts and depressed salaries, must have been the response of most media companies, beyond the restricted adoption of media technologies, due to budget constraints. In any case, those processes were taking place while the neoliberal turn transformed the role of the state in the economy, reversing labor legislation, public investments and detailed regulations for a number of domains. Trade and financial liberalization were also pushed by neoliberal policies. The impact of that societal change in media was expressed as a process of further deregulation, accompanied with the concentration of ownership and establishment of a

dominant commercial logic (Bourdieu, 1996; Feintuck, Varney, 2006; Horwitz, 2005; McChesney, 2008; Dawes, 2017).

In Ecuador that process was articulated similarly to other Latin American cases, where media concentration was fostered, producing monopolistic and oligopolistic scenarios (Sinclair, 1999; Fox & Waisbord, 2002; Segura & Waisbord, 2016). Cases such as Globo in Brazil, Clarín in Argentina or Televisa in Mexico illustrate that point. However, Ecuador was distinct in some respects. The Andean country, due to the small size and fragmented nature of its national market, never produced monopolistic ‘national media champions’, although a degree of concentration and cross investment among media and other economic activities took place. During the 1980s and 1990s, there were mergers and operations among media companies and other corporations (such as financial institutions, or agricultural firms), and several groups were formed. There is some consensus among the few studies or essays published (Checa Godoy, 2012; Kitzberger, 2016) that a sort of concentration between financial and media groups was formed, and few groups dominated Ecuador’s media landscape, at least until Correa’s coming to power in 2007.

In any case, and supporting these claims based on the few articles available (Jordán & Panchana, 2009; Checa Godoy, 2012; Gehrke et al., 2016) and interviews in the field focused on the Ecuadorian media market¹⁰, between 5 to 9 media corporations dominated the country since the return of the democracy in 1979 until Rafael Correa came to power in 2007. A special case may be that of the major newspapers’ ownership, where four families control the most influential press in the country. The Pérez family has owned *El Universo*,

¹⁰ Especially informative was the long in-depth interview with Christian Luzuriaga, marketing manager at Kantar Ibope, the main company providing audience and advertising data of the Ecuadorean media markets.

since the 1920s; the Mantilla and Ortega families have done the same with *El Correo* since 1906 (and *Hoy* newspaper, founded in 1982) until the sale of the group in 2015; the Martínez Merchán family have owned *Expreso* and *Extra* since the 1970s; and the Aspiazu family controlled *El Telégrafo* from the 1880s until its nationalization in 2008¹¹.

Table 0.1: Ecuador's Main Media Companies in 2007 (Jordán & Panchana, 2009)

Company	Turn-over (millions of dollars)
1. Isaias Group	114.5
2. El Universo Group	52.27
3. Grupo El Comercio (Mantilla-Ortega)	46.55
4. Grupo Egas	40.70
5. Grupo Alvarado Roca- Ecuavisa.	36.29*
6. Grupo GRANASA	21.56
7. Grupo RTS	17.84
8. Grupo Rivas-Relad	14**
9. Grupo Eljuri- Etv Telerama	2.73

In some way, and perhaps due to notorious links between media companies and financial institutions (unequivocally manifest in cases such as Isaias, Egas and Eljuri media groups), news media's editorial lines were very often criticized by progressive voices and activists who called into question journalism's independence or, at least, news media pluralism (Reyes, 2011; Checa-Godoy, 2012; Kitzberger, 2016; Acosta & Calvopiña, 2017) as we will profusely discuss further. On the other hand, the fact that relations between the media and the state were transformed, did not mean that government's influence on media disappeared. This was seen on the use of public advertising in printed and audiovisual media,

¹¹ An interesting discussion about Ecuadorian media ownership and its articulation as interests' groups on specific issues (the institutionalization of social security in this case) can be found in the interesting work of Ezequiel Luis Bistoletti (2019). That peculiar Ecuadorian newspapers' ownership configuration, above introduced, is taken from his work.

as well as in other subsidies (such as tax-free paper or reduced valued added taxes) especially amidst the long depression between 1984 and the 1990s.

As for regulation, a silent but problematic deregulation dominated in the country, since no law was explicitly repealed during those decades, and only one major piece of legislation –the Radio and Television Law from 1975– was reformed in 1995¹². This legal reform, however, introduced the category ‘community media’, which could have been a triumph for some media reformers and many constituencies, especially in rural and indigenous areas. But key strict limitations were established on the funding sources and monitoring of this type of media. According to the law, those organizations that wanted to define themselves as community media had to receive their funding from nonprofit institutions, which were in most of the cases nonexistent in rural areas; additionally, their creation was contingent on the permission of the Army. Those provisions, which made invisible many community radios, unable to fund themselves without any advertising from local business, and militarized their regulation, were finally reformed in 2002 and totally removed in the Communication Law of 2013.

2.1.- Alternative media during the neoliberal rule

The lack of regulation (save the problematic exception of the 1995 reform), the nonexistence of public broadcasters, media concentration and the unstable democracy probably fostered the creation of alternative forms of communication, such as community or local media in rural areas and alternative media in urban centers. The absolute commercial

¹² See more at <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/tres-saltos-tuvo-ley-radio.html>

logic in television, with all channels providing similar cheap and poor-quality content –most of it telenovelas imported from Mexico, Colombia or Venezuela, besides entertainment programs from American producers¹³–, and the lack of access to a national press centered on urban areas and elite audience, as we will see in the following chapters, left huge percentages of the population without any representation in mass media. In that context, local media, especially radio and some municipal newspapers, did the job of informing about regional events and needs in rural zones. Community media also embraced this task, especially in indigenous areas, although the 1995 reform of Radio and Television Broadcasting Law made extremely difficult to differentiate between local/regional and community radios or newspapers.

In that context, an important event marked politics, and of course Ecuadorean journalism since 1980. For the first time in Ecuadorian history, in that year an indigenous organization was created, the CONACNIE (Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Nacionalidades Indígenas¹⁴), and in November 1986 at Quito, the definitive CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador¹⁵), a key player in Ecuadorean society and politics, was formed¹⁶. After organizing an important uprising in 1990, followed by their essential role in Abdalá Bucharam’s fall in 1997 and in Jamil Mahuad’s deposition in 2000, CONAIE’s and the indigenous movement proved to have a stunning influence in

¹³ More information about Ecuadorian television content is available at Jordan & Panchana (2009), Villafuerte (2016) or Mier (2016), although there’s a generalized scarcity about the subject, and primary sources may be not very reliable.

¹⁴ National Coordination Council of Indigenous Nationalities.

¹⁵ National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

¹⁶ Information retrieved at CONAIE: <https://conaie.org/quienes-somos/>

the country¹⁷. At the same time, legal protections and support for community media were transformed into key requests for the movement.

The logical marriage between community media and the influential indigenous movement triggered the creation of organizations such as Coordinadora de Medios Populares y Educativos del Ecuador¹⁹ (CORAPE) in 1988²⁰, or Radio Voz del Upano's Centro Regional de Educación Formativa para la Región Amazónica, an association established in 1985, focused on radio and media education among residents of that region (Acosta, Calvopiña & Cañizares, 2017). However, the weight of Catholic and Evangelical churches alongside with private parties on most of the stations represented at CORAPE, situated the actual representation of indigenous community media in[?] around 18% of all stations (Acosta, Calvopiña & Cañizares, 2017: 6-7). As it was mentioned above, coalitions among indigenous nationalities, broadly represented by CONAIE and later by its political wing, Pachakutik, created in 1995, achieved the reform of the Radio and Television Broadcasting Law in 2002.

That said, the influence of community and alternative media over the political system was never so openly visible as during the 1999 *Feriado Bancario*, the financial crash that

¹⁷ That capacity of the indigenous movement is still extremely present. For instance, the explosive demonstrations of October 2019, more than two years after Correa's presidency, were led by CONAIE and the indigenous movement; so strong and threatening that the the government left Quito and established Guayaquil as the provisional capital of the country during the most critical moments.

¹⁸ It is important to notice that the emergence of the indigenous movement in Ecuador was not an isolated phenomenon in Latin American, and the change in the region from assimilationism towards multiculturalism was taking different forms in many nations, being Ecuador's CONAIE and Mexico's EZLN perhaps the most known cases (Mattiace, 2007) together with Bolivia's *Cocalero* movement.

¹⁹ Popular, Educational and Media Coordinator of Ecuador in Spanish. Curiously, now the name of the organization includes the category 'Comunitarios' or 'Community' in the acronym CORAPE. More information at <https://www.corape.org.ec/satelital/contenido/item/quienes-somos>

²⁰ There's some confusion about CORAPE's date of creation. Acosta, Calvopiña and Cañizares (2017) agree on 1988, although the organization itself doesn't provide a date on its webpage and institutional resources.

resulted in a GDP drop of around 20% (Jacome, 2004). According to many authors (Checa Godoy, 2012; Gehrke et al, 2016; Jordán & Panchana, 2009; Kitzberger, 2016; Reyes, 2011) and many of the interviewees (at least 10 out of 31 mentioned that crisis), the ownership of key media outlets, especially major newspapers and television stations, conditioned reporting on Ecuador's main financial firms and institutions. What's more, once the collapse impacted the country, the Isaias and Egas groups, represented by their respective media (for instance, Isaias's TC Television versus Egas' Teleamazonas), starred a bitter struggle between private companies' interests (not reporting or assessing the real situation of the country) before a stunned audience, populated by citizens who had lost their savings in 1999. Some authors called it the *War of the Channels* of 2004 and 2005 (Kitzberger, 2016; Reyes, 2010). That sort of crude evidence of lack of objectivity and blatant defense of private interests using daily news, fueled an extremely poor opinion of Ecuadorian citizens about media.

It was just amidst those turbulent times that a new different, alternative radio came to light. Radio *La Luna*, established in 1996 at Quito by Paco Velasco, a journalist graduated from Universidad Central, was financially supported in its beginnings by then Quito mayor Jamil Mahuad. However, four years later, *La Luna* had the scoop of president Mahuad's resignation in the words of the Army official that dispersed the Congress taken by indigenous organizations in January 2000 (Velasco, 2000). *La Luna*, the quintessential example of urban alternative media, gathering dissident voices from many fields besides politics (it was one of the few radios broadcasting alien genres for mainstream media such as hard rock, ska or hip hop), became famous in the country during those years, although its inception seemed

linked to CEDEP's strategy of producing media to politicize agrarian and urban workers in the 1980s²¹. According to some authors (Checa Godoy, 2012; Freidemberg, 2015; Kitzberger, 2016; Navas, 2011) and some of the interviewees (Orlando Pérez, Giovanna Tassi, Raquel Escobar), its political talks shows, such as *No Lapsus*, assembling politicians and analysts from different political stances, were legendary, and its role in the fall of Gutiérrez's government and the rise of the so-called *Revolución de los Forajidos* in 2005, key. Chapter 1 will focus and elaborate further on *La Luna's* position during the 2005-2006 populist biennium in Ecuador and the emergence of Rafael Correa as the perfect, media savvy, candidate²² in the midst of that turbulent social and political context.

3.- The path to understanding and explaining Correa's Ecuador and its implications

With Correa and his so-called Citizen's Revolution, which started to dominate Ecuador since the 2006 election, a deep media transformation was indeed experienced in the Andean country in clear contrast with the past. However, before doing fieldwork, my basic knowledge about the media and political landscape in Ecuador was marked, mostly, by the

²¹ In her text, Martha Dubravcic points out how popular celebrations of Febres Cordero's election in rural areas sparked a critical reflection in the organization about the effectivity of their communicational techniques (2002: 99) in bringing awareness to the people. According to Dubravcic, CEDEP started their mass communication plan in 1984 with many radio experiences throughout the country but the *pièce de résistance* would be founded more than ten years after.

²² Paco Velasco, like many of the team running the radio, ended up working for Alianza País or the new public media created right after Correa came to power in 2007. Velasco himself was designated minister although he would resign in 2012. Part of the crew launched the new community media organization El Churo, and another radio station, Wambra Radio, still active in 2019 and using community media legislation passed during Correa's government in 2013 (and reformed in 2019), although working mostly as a digital medium. Their allegiance to Correa, as happened, on the other hand, with most of the indigenous movements, would be total during Correa's first years and the Constituent Assembly. Later, their views on Correa, the man and the regime, would be divided, constituting part of the leftist opposition to Alianza País' governments.

polarization and clash between opposing narratives. This is why from the very beginning I decided to frame the Ecuadorean case as a ‘media war’. It was, from my perspective, a contest between camps and interests, some attacking the government and defending conservative stances, some supporting the populist president and addressing more progressive positions. Possibly my professional background, having lived and worked in a Polarized Pluralist country such as Spain and a Liberal-Captured media system such as Mexico kept me on guard against quite narrow liberal (or rather libertarian) views on the matter, framing Correa's case as a kind of authoritarian oppressor of a supposedly independent press. As naïve or simplistic as they can be, these discourses understanding Correa as a despot interested in suppressing critical media to maintain his regime, are surprisingly pervasive and even dominant in mainstream scholarship and public discussions as we will see in the following chapters.

But that was not, in any event, the impression I got about Ecuador, as I already featured in the first pages of this introduction. First of all, as already observed in the conflictive Ecuadorean history, I was ready to see fights, and competing interests, but I was going to learn and experience a lot more after my immersion in the case. And that was exactly what I tried to get from my scientific approach to the problem. As we will see in this study, there was polarization in the Ecuadorean case, but there were not strict boundaries between populist and media actors, and a fascinating process of journalistic professionalization occurred, pointing to the need for a distinct approach toward understanding populism, polarization and the role of the state creating conditions for a better journalism's and a more diverse public sphere to thrive.

3.1.- Methods and theories

The path to obtain those findings and arguments (which will be discussed in more detail later) was complex but pre-designed to avoid strongly ingrained assumptions, and to comprehend and observe how over the years important trends emerged and occurred. I embraced from the start, hence, a mixed-methods perspective basing my research on qualitative and quantitative strategies to examine fully the ethnographic and observational dimensions of the case. At the end of the day, I borrowed the classical dialectical conversation between “subjectivism and objectivism” (Bourdieu, 1977), or between the phenomenological exploration and the positivist collection of data, trying to develop a productive synthesis of all the experiences, information or records collected. Max Weber (1978) characterized this dual perspective as an epistemological field divided between an explanatory/observational (*Erklärung*) position about the object, and an approach of understanding (*Verstehen*) upon the object. Weber, obviously, urged social scientists to combine these positionings, complementing each other to get access to the most completed conclusions about an actor, a phenomenon or social process. This has been my methodological and epistemological *point de départ*.

Thus, starting with the ‘understanding’ dimension, I developed fieldwork in Ecuador for 16 weeks during the summers of 2017 and 2018. An office room and first contacts were provided by the Department of Communication and International Relations in Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales’ (Flacso) at Quito, but I also collected important contacts or informants in mainstream Ecuadorean media (private and public) thanks to

sources from my former life as a journalist and editor in Spain and Mexico. In total, I organized and carried out 31 in-depth interviews held in Quito and Guayaquil, which in many cases were arranged twice to know the interviewees views about the changing political and media landscape between 2017 and 2018. Interviews were semi-structured, made in Spanish and usually long, in most of the cases lasting around 90 minutes. My questionnaire was based on their impressions around the Correa era and its impact on journalism and news media in Ecuador, including questions around the clash between Correa and the media, the evolution of journalism under Correa, the relationships between media and democracy or journalism's role in the society. Other aspects and views emerged in the conversations, such as personal experiences on specific moments, details of Correa's government, or unknown lessons from the past contextualizing Correa's phenomenon; these open moments in interviews gathered very interesting inflections and informed subsequent interviews, research questions and viewpoints. At the moment of the interviews, my subjects were 8 journalists working for public media (press, radio and television), 12 journalists working for private media (press, digital media and television), 5 analysts (many of them, frequent guest on radio or television shows), 3 top-ranked policymakers in communication institutions during Correa's presidency, 1 political advisor (very critical against Correa), 1 representative of the leading press freedom association in the country and 1 expert working on Ibope Media, the company monitoring audience ratings and advertising investments in the Ecuadorean media market. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed following a 'constant comparative method' (Tracy, 2013: 190-191), especially looking for relevant consensus or disagreements among the interviewees. First, in a preliminary phase, I explored the

responses using an open coding identifying around 20 emergent issues using both manual coding and text research tools, coming out from the condensation or iteration of meaningful topics. For the secondary coding, I moved into a more analytical approach, assessing the participants' ideological and sectorial position around several key questions such as 'press freedom', 'regulation', 'professionalism', 'clash between government and the media', 'Correa's rise' or 'media and democracy'.

Alongside interviews, I was a participant observer in contexts (for instance, informal meetings with reporters or editors, conversations with local university professors, politicians, talks with hosts from the places I was living or with conjunctural friendships, etc.) that changed surprisingly during the two periods I was present in Ecuador. I did newsroom ethnographies in 2018 at *Expreso* newspaper headquarters in Guayaquil and in Quito, grasping important aspects of journalistic professional work that critically informed my research. This experience within a real newsroom was especially important in assessing what other types of data, ethnographic or observational, were telling about journalistic professionalism related to the political and legal context of different periods in recent Ecuadorean history. Having worked as a journalist myself, it was quite fascinating to see how different some codes, technical labor or class and race hierarchies were compared to other countries and regions. This experience and my overall perspective as a participant observer were reflected in a field notebook, where I tried to write every day, summarizing events, meetings and interesting situations for research. Paul Rabinow's (2007) reflections on fieldwork and experiences around "the encounter with the Other" in the context of

research, were amazingly relevant in many moments of my journey in Ecuador²³. As the reader will see, many of my notes contextualize and illustrate further a number of meaningful moments of the research, several times adopting the form of footnotes, but not only.

3.2.- Content Analysis

As for the quantitative approach, I thought and later designed, mostly *after* my first visit in 2017, a content analysis that had to be longitudinal, to observe how the political and legal changes were reflected in news content over the years. This was a tough task for such a dynamic (or turbulent) political history. Let's recall that between 2000 and 2005, Ecuador had seen four different presidents ruling the nation, with only one of them elected. The soft coups, the frequent *ad hoc* political parties, constituted by fractions or specific elites without consistent ideological or policy-based purposes, or the weight of a sort of emptied populism led by Abdalá Bucaram and Lucio Gutiérrez, blurred clear lines or cleavages in the political system. Accordingly, the more traditional or stable political parties (Partido Social Cristiano, Izquierda Democrática and Pachakutik) have had a very volatile electoral role since 2000 and the emergence of Alianza País, Correa's electoral platform created in 2006, which disrupted the system even more. Besides this, the codebook and code sheet²⁴ needed to respond to the succession of new or expired institutions over the years, and to distinct symbolic settings that sometimes challenged the traditional ideological or identity cleavages

²³ I have to highlight that the seminar course 'Ethnographic Methods', facilitated by Professor Boatema Boateng at the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego, in which I was enrolled in the fall of 2016, provided the perfect updated bibliography and practical resources to engage a full multimodal ethnographic work. I found especially useful the works of Andersson (2014) and Boellstorff (2015), besides Rabinow's (2007).

²⁴ See full documents at the Appendix.

from Western societies. More specifically to assess news media, the content analysis had to find ways to circumvent powerful but false dominating discourses, such as considering the ‘independent press’ as almost automatically professional and autonomous *per se*, without much examination. It was, in conclusion, an intricate and living process that very often had to be adapted and redesigned to meet the Ecuadoran reality. I must say that this type of content analysis would not have been possible without the intense fieldwork in Quito and Guayaquil.

As noted above, the goal became to produce a complete picture about what happened to news content in three ‘eras’: *before Correa* (2005 and 2006), *during Correa* (2015 and 2016) and *after Correa’s* presidency (2018). Two units of analysis were selected, the story and the source, to add more detail and deepness to the research. A total of 960 stories, incorporating 2297 sources, were divided between the most important newspapers in the country, *El Comercio* (Quito based) and *El Universo* (located in Guayaquil). Articles were randomly selected (eight per month, per newspaper) from the Politics, Ecuador/Society and Editorial/Opinion sections. The inclusion of opinion pages, it was thought, would provide a good scenario to examine how the difference between opinion and news had displayed over the years. Stories were taken from both newspapers’ printed edition, since in years 2005 and 2006 the Internet penetration in Ecuador was still very weak. Nexis Unis software was used to search content on *El Comercio* for years 2015, 2016 and 2018; but the Quito’s newspaper own search engine was preferred, given reliability issues with Nexis Unis content (mostly on systematic dates and the type of the edition). For years 2005 and 2006, I enjoyed the collaboration of graduate students enrolled in the Master’s in Communication at Flacso, who

took pictures of the newspapers randomly selected at the local library in Quito. For *El Universo* the study relied on this newspaper's own search engine, which was very robust, although it disappeared from *El Universo's* website in 2020.

As commented above, the research was focused on years 2005 and 2006 (two years before Correa came to power), 2015 and 2016 (two years in which Correa was at his peak of popularity and the Communication Law was already implemented) and 2018 (a year after Correa's departure from power). 2005 and 2006 were two very interesting years in contemporary Ecuador, in which popular revolts, marked by *Revolta de los Forajidos* in April 2005, were followed by President Lucio Gutiérrez's removal from power through a soft coup d'état by the end of that month. Gutiérrez's former vice-president, Alberto Palacio, would head an unstable government without clear legislative support until the presidential elections of 2006. Rafael Correa served as Minister of Finance during barely three months in Palacio's government (from April 20 to August 5, 2005), resigning due to differences with the president regarding negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. In 2015 and 2016, Correa was at his peak of power and popularity, although the bad situation of international oil prices was starting to hurt the country's economy. To make matters worse, a severe earthquake shook the nation on April 16, 2016. Finally, 2018 was chosen to test the post-Correa situation in the press, once the leader was out of power and, to the surprise of the many, the new president and former Correa comrade, Lenín Moreno, reversed most of the policies put in place by the previous government.

Several variables, some of them more general, some of them more directly focused on responding to specific research questions and hypotheses, were planned. In total 12

variables were selected and coded in the following order: genre, subject, origin of the story, politics frame, controlling political actors, ideology, political parallelism, the people, the enemy, tone, target, and source. However, after running reliability tests, three of them (origin, politics frame and controlling actors) had to be ruled out, without losing much of the research power. The *genre* variable provided information on the writing style of each article. The genre evolution over the years delivered information about the complexity of each style (for instance, a *reportaje*, or an in-depth story, is far more difficult to perform than a generic news release with bare facts) and about the distinction between opinion and news, especially if some opinative article would show up in the news sections. The *subject* variable basically presented the topic covered by the story and it could introduce information on how the main themes have (or have not) changed between periods; subjects of articles were retrieved through iteration of themes and via sources employed. The *ideology* variable coded partisan stances following the classic left/right cleavage. There were two ways of evaluating this variable: one based on citations of political actors, normally used in news stories where sources were present and values manifested were not clear, and another one, centered on values expressed in articles (many of them opinion pieces). The ‘left’ was identified with progressive values, state intervention, distrusts in economic liberalism and focus on collective rights; the ‘right’ was linked to economic liberalism, praise of traditional values and focus on individual rights. Very often several political actors were cited in a story, left-right ideologies were mixed (for instance, support of traditional values together with distrust of the market) or not clearly identifiable political actors were cited (for example, political

entrepreneurs without a neat ideological adscription, very common in the Ecuadorean context); in those cases, stories were coded as ‘transversal’.

Additionally, the *political parallelism* variable was thought to interrogate key issues related to discussions about populism and important features of Latin American media systems. As it will be explained further in chapters 5 and 6, this was an exploratory and pioneering variable since it is not clear at all that political parallelism is actually present in Latin America media systems in the way they are in Europe (Albuquerque, 2013). In any case, the variable collected explicit rejections and support to relevant political actors and institutions (especially the government) during the different periods. The *people* and *enemy* variables observed how populist ideas were expressed through media. The variable *people* coded mentions to the ‘people’ under several acceptations in Spanish, making associations with a specific people (an Indigenous nationality, for example) or the citizenship, the nation, etc. Negative or neutral connotations of the people were also coded. For the *enemy* variable, a number of alleged enemies of the people were coded, from the political class, the oligarchy, banks to immigrants. The variable *tone* examined newspaper’s stance regarding political actors, including the government; it distinguished between ‘deferential’, ‘neutral’ or ‘adversarial’ reporting, depending on the sources employed, and the perspective used in the story. The variable *target* classified the content into ‘elitist’ (articles made by specialized sources such as experts, lawyers, politicians, etc.), ‘popular’ (by non-specialized sources such as ordinary people, social movement leaders, etc.), ‘pluralist/civic’ (a mix between specialized and non-specialized sources) and ‘partisan’ (supported by sources that targeted a specific political actor). Finally, the *source* variable was rather general, although very

complex and informative; it was thought to evaluate many dimensions of the analysis and shaped many of the other variables. Its categories covered many actors and institutions, and were collected by citations or quotes. They helped to construct many other variables and at the same time spoke about significant differences between periods, as we will see further in the study. SPSS statistical software was used to building and storing two main datasets (one with sources included, another without) and to produce statistical analysis to look for significant differences and relevant changes over the years.

Complementing these two basic bodies of research, I employed indispensable historical methods to make sense of Correa's transformations, using local archives in Ecuador and the immense material available at the University of California libraries, either for primary or secondary sources. Opinion polls delivered by Latinobarometro were also quite useful to understand the institutional context before, during and after Correa. As a political sociologist by training, I always kept an eye on the institutionalist dimension of the case and path dependency questions. For media research, I found especially useful Bannerman and Haggart's (2015) work on applying historical institutionalism to communication studies.

3.3.- Current theories and structure

This study is inspired by and at the same time confronts four distinct theoretical bodies. One is built on questions and arguments drawn from the mediatization of politics theories, –in which mediatization is defined by the influence of a media logic composed of three dimensions (commercialization, professionalism and media technologies) over the

political logic—, a second one is composed by research and reflections on the relationship between press freedom and populism, a third one focuses on the explicit connection between populism and journalism, and, finally, a fourth one, emerges mostly from Latin America on issues regarding communication, populism and media reform. In this manner, the relationship between mediatization and populism is addressed here observing analyses which seem to highlight the productive feedback between a powerful media logic, or the mediatization of politics, (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hjarvard, 2015; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Snow & Altheide, 1979) and populism (Aalberg et al, 2017; Hameleers & Vliegthart, 2020; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008, 2014; Meyer, 2006; Moffitt, 2016; Peck, 2019). Additionally, that mediatization/populism body is accompanied by a literature, which approaches the relationship between populism and news media as almost logically opposed or negative, understanding populism as a direct threat to press freedom and democracy (Conaghan, 2016; Kellam & Stein, 2016; Kenny, 2020; Mudde & Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2012; Rogenhofer & Panievsky, 2020; Waisbord, 2018). Furthermore, the scarcer number of studies centered on the specific relationship between journalism and populism (Esser, Stepinska & Hopmann, 2017; Hameleers & de Vreese, 2019; Hameleers & Vliegthart, 2020) is here also evaluated under their different manifestations and regional logics.

Those studies —most of them overrepresenting research from the United States and Northern Europe— are put into discussion with scholarship rooted in a Latin American perspective on politics and media (Albuquerque, 2005, 2013; Follari, 2010; Martin-Barbero, 1987; Samet, 2019) and in media policy discussions (Cerbino, Maluf & Ramos, 2016;

Freedman, 2018; Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Pickard, 2014; Segura Soledad, & Waisbord, 2016). Populism in my work is defined by Mudde's basic 'ideational approach' (2004), by which populism is defined as a thin ideology dividing the world between the people and some elites, in direct conversation with Laclau's (2005) 'discursive perspective', which reverberates throughout the study, mainly in chapter 1 and the conclusion and considers populism as the ground zero of the political logic itself. In my research, I claim that although some aspects of both the European approach and the 'negativist' perspective do come into view in Ecuador, the evidence drawn from ethnographic work and media content points out to a more multidimensional picture, discussing or directly contradicting established views and presupposed narratives about the relationship between media and populism, besides addressing remarkable gaps in the mainstream research on issues such as media populism or political parallelism outside Europe.

Finally, this study is structured around this set of research questions:

RQ1.- How did the relationship between the media and the government in Ecuador evolve before, during and after Correa's presidency?

RQ2.- How and why did Correa's populism emerge and consolidate?

RQ3.- How did the relationship between Correa as a populist actor and the media develop over all the periods covered?

RQ4.- Why did Correa and the press develop an antagonistic relationship?

RQ5.- How did Correa's media reform, especially after the passage of the Communication Law, impact journalistic professionalism and media populism?

RQ6.- How did Lenin Moreno's shift impact journalistic professionalism?

In the pages that follow I present the key findings related to these questions:

1.- *Correa's presidency clearly changed Ecuador's media system and the traditional relationship between news media and political actors.* As we will see the transformation of legal and political contexts impacted profoundly the relations between media and politics and therefore shaped the media system. Before Correa came to power, and following the institutional path established from the past, Ecuador's media system was characterized by opaque and possibly clientelist relations between political actors and the media; news media, also, appeared to be 'captured' by economic elites' interests, as we saw above, with the strong financial relations between corporations and media organizations. Under Correa's presidency this reality was challenged, and a different media system crystallized, shaped by Correa's media policies and the populist president's media activity. Once Moreno came to power and reversed Correa's policies the situation went back to a situation similar, although not identical from before Correa.

2.- *A symbiotic relationship was established between populism and news media at least since 2005-2006,* where both logics appeared confounded in a conflictive although productive activity. Correa's clash with the media can in no way be characterized as the pure struggle between the 'independent press' and an encroaching political actor; rather, both fields (political and media) happened to be clearly interdependent and fed each other, the media becoming more and more political, the populist president emerging as a strong media savvy actor able to internalize and reuse media's grammars and practices.

3.- *Correa's media reform clearly increased journalistic professionalism in Ecuador,* improving the Ecuadorean public sphere in aspects of openness, diversity and

pluralism, besides professional practices. Drawing from discourses that emerged in the interviews and from significant findings derived from news content analysis, I conclude that media performed more professionally and were more public interested oriented under the rule of a populist president. This a very important finding since it provides new interesting dimensions to understand populism in power and forces us to consider the role of the state to foster professionalism and a better public sphere.

4.- *Improvements in journalistic professionalism were simultaneous to an increasing polarization.* This evidence situates the conditions to elicit professionalism under a new perspective: political clash or antagonism between the government and mainstream media correlated with increasing professionalism. Since it is difficult to imagine that deep media reform –which very likely triggered the change in professionalism– could have happened without Correa in power, that polarization may have been necessary, or at some point causal, for increasing professionalism. This dimension also adds another fascinating aspect to journalism’s development and improvement.

5.- *Under the populist presidency a kind of political parallelism was consolidated for the first time in the media;* the main cleavage seemed to be Correa’s political figure. This is another very important finding since there is not available research assessing the question of political parallelism in Latin America, and in a pioneer manner it can point out to preconditions to develop this scenario, which in Ecuador was marked by a cleavage established around Correa’s figure.

6.- *Once Moreno reversed most of Correa’s policies, including media, professionalism deteriorated, and a sort of asymmetrical polarization and political*

parallelism was established around Correa's rejection. Supported by discourses that emerged in the interviews and ethnographic work, besides key conclusions from the content analysis, Moreno's change after Correa left the Ecuadorean media system in a worse shape than before. Professionalism deteriorated, pluralism was strongly reduced, and the public sphere suffered. Interestingly, a non-populist, more traditional political actor produced a far worse scenario, contradicting most research, theories or mainstream public discussions around the relationship between populism and press freedom, the independent press or good critical journalism.

Finally, with all these questions and evidence in mind, two main arguments, already outlined above, run through this examination: 1) *Today, the relations between populism and the media cannot be understood as the exchange or contrast between two different logics, but as a conflictive symbiosis,* challenging current mediatization and mainstream political communication theories, and 2) *the role of the state in fostering institutions and conditions for free and independent journalism is central and has to be rethought,* defying mainstream theories and discussions about the rise of professional journalism.

The structure of this dissertation takes a form that mixes chronological sequence and thematic discussion of fundamental dimensions. In this way, chapter 1 focuses on the conditions and the emergence of Rafael Correa as a populist candidate in the fascinating 2005-2006 biennium. It will help us to situate Correa and Ecuador immediately before deep changes were carry out and to put into historical context questions related to populism's rise and its relationship with the media. In chapter 2, once Correa is already in power, the clash between the new government and mainstream media takes the center of the discussion. In

assessing chronologically how Correa's government and the media evolved in their relationship, we see how many policies and actions occurred on the go, and both actors, Correa and the media, consequently evolved at the same time, with critical moments or milestones that showed two logics that wanted to control each other. Chapter 3, assuming a more topical and less chronological logic, goes further into that clash and how it is defined and developed in a symbolic and political-economic way. Correa, this chapter explains, not only triggered fundamental laws and institutions, such as the Communication Law of 2013, but also disrupted mainstream media's symbolic dominance with a key populist show, *Enlace Ciudadano*; both dimensions are here presented at the same time of introducing the idea that a sort of 'conflictive symbiosis' took place between media and Correa.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6, introduce directly a discussion based on the evidence collected from the ethnographic work and content analysis. First, in chapter 4, discourse analysis drawn from in-depth interviews features strong contradictions between what journalists and media actors thought about Correa's populist regime, and what mainstream scholarship and discussions state about the relationships between populism, press freedom and journalism; in this chapter, a majority of subjects acknowledge an improvement in journalistic professionalism with Correa. In chapter 5, the content analysis of the main Ecuadorean newspapers explores further that view and the impact of Correa's regime on journalism comparing periods before and during Correa. The results support the improvement of important aspects of journalistic professionalism and the change of the Ecuadoran media system under Correa. Chapter 6, finally, assesses the political shift with Lenin Moreno in power, going back to a more chronological approach on the case. The results point that

professionalism clearly deteriorates with Moreno in power and a new media system emerges characterized by the deep alignment of the government and the media sharing a common enemy: Correa and his legacy. In the conclusion chapter, the main arguments introduced above are historically situated producing a reflection on media and political change today in Latin America and abroad.

Chapter 1

“Dale Correa”: Institutional crisis, ‘full media populism’ and the 2006 election

On June 12, 2005, in its Sunday issue, Quito’s *El Comercio* published an interesting interview in the Business section. It was a quite professional and not too adversarial conversation with the current Minister of Economy, a former professor at University of San Francisco of Quito with a PhD in Economics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He was also one of the most controversial officials in Alfredo Palacio’s interim administration which emerged after the events of April in the Ecuadorean capital. His name was Rafael Correa, and he was already quite known among journalists and the public, especially by those interested in progressive shows, such as the program *No Lapsus*, broadcasted by the alternative Radio La Luna. Some even nicknamed Correa as the “Forajido Minister” stressing the close association between Correa and the popular unrest that anteceded Lucio Gutiérrez’s fall in April 2005.

It was a very technical interview. Questions about oil resources’ management and hard negotiations with the International Monetary Fund dominated. However, there was room for more general political inquiries, and by the final part of the conversation the journalist asked whether some rumors were true about the Minister’s alleged electoral plans for the 2006 presidential elections. Correa responded: “Those are wild imaginations. They have been unable and incompetent to criticize economic policies and now they invent these electoral purposes. Why do they punish me? Because my name is not Mauricio [the previous Minister of Economy] and I’m not as nasty as a pancreatic cancer? My interest is to serve to

the people and to survive to this”. Correa would remain as Minister for less than two more months, exactly until August 8 of that year. Deep disagreements with President Palacio regarding the foreign debt’s restructuring hastened Correa’s resignation.

As shown in that interview, during his tenure and after his departure, Correa tried to present himself as a coherent expert, opposed to the rule of things in the same way it had been for years. Additionally, Correa, the persona and media character, didn’t save firing stinging words upon his enemies, in this case calling his predecessor in the Ministry ‘pancreatic cancer’. Furthermore, the Economics professor, a frequent scholarly voice in Ecuador’s alternative media, framed his goal as public official as a basic service “to the people”; a phrasing, by the way, which might presuppose that before him the professionals at the helm of the Ecuadorean economy didn’t serve the people’s interest. As we will see in this chapter, the people, or at least the expression of the people, was overwhelmingly present in the Ecuadorean society and in its media; and connected in some way to the events of April 2005 in Quito.

Yet, around a year after those declarations were made, Correa was one of the many candidates to the 2006 presidential elections. Thirteen contenders presented their candidacy, some of them belonged to the more or less established parties (such as Izquierda Democrática, Partido Social Cristiano or the indigenous party, Pachakutik) and several of them presented *ad hoc* electoral platforms, led by political mavericks and outsiders. Rafael Correa would win the election by 56% of the vote in a contested runoff against Alvaro Noboa, a billionaire Banana business mogul who had been candidate in the 2002 elections. In this chapter, we will examine the media context and the actions that Rafael Correa took

from that period in which he was designated as a Minister (in the aftermath of the *Forajido* Revolt of April 2005) and that key moment in which the Guayaquil professor was elected as president. As we will see, most of the media, alternative *and* mainstream, played a key role in Correa's victory, conditioned by the deep representation crisis that the country was going through since the late 1990s. Results drawn from content analysis of the two most influential Ecuadorean newspapers, the examination of very influential radio and television shows and the analysis of in-depth interviews with journalists and policy actors active during those years, suggest that a kind of full media populism was strongly present in the country's media system, besides the warm reception or even the direct media support of Correa's populist campaign in 2006. The product of a crisis that was basically political and institutional, Correa's rise illustrates a situation in which media populism and an efficient populist campaign worked together an *avant la lettre* mediatization of politics in Ecuador in which populist communication was placed at the center.

In the following pages, we will see how the 2005 events featured probably the deepest political and representation crisis in contemporary Ecuador providing the perfect context for what appeared to be an intense populist biennium. This context was introduced, remarkably, throughout different types of media formats, such as alternative radio shows, prime time television documentaries or legacy newspapers, reflecting a full media populism, or a type of communication that filled the void of the broken bonds (organizational or just in terms of confidence) between most of the citizens and 'politics'. Within those conditions, Correa was the ablest political actor, analyzing acutely the political situation, and producing the communication more perfectly aligned with that media environment. In short, media and

its productive relationship with populist ideas were at the core of Rafael Correa's ascension to power. This scenario, which apparently stresses arguments of the mediatization of politics thesis, by which a media logic exerts a critical influence over political actors, was introduced from the very beginning of Correa's political project, marking his long presidency, his clashes with journalists and the setting up of one of the boldest media reforms in Latin America.

1.- The representation crisis of 2005

Much has been written and discussed about the *Rebelión de los Forajidos*²⁵ in Quito in April 2005 which eventually led the way to a complex populist momentum; especially in Ecuador's academic and public discourse (Bustamante, 2005; Hurtado, 2005; Paltán, 2005; Ramírez, 2005; Ramos, 2005; Larrea, 2009). That revolt, which was mostly based in Quito and other cities in the Sierra region, erupted during the second week of April 2005 denouncing current President Lucio Gutiérrez's administration. The immediate cause of the several waves of protests in the country leading to Gutiérrez's deposition in April the 20th is usually focused on Gutiérrez's alliance with Abdalá Bucaram, the former president, to change the composition of Ecuador's judiciary branch, breaking all the formalities established in the 1998 Constitution. Mainstream media and opposition parties condemned those operations as a *coup d'état* and warned of Ecuador's transformation into a dictatorship.

²⁵ A quick note about the origin of the name of the revolt, 'Forajido' ('brigand' or 'outlaw' in English). This word appeared for the first time on April 14, 2005, after a group of demonstrators tried to bring their grievances at the gates of President Lucio Gutiérrez's private house in an affluent neighborhood in Quito. Gutiérrez, very offended by this action, called these protestors "a bunch of Forajidos". The day after, thousands marched in the streets of Quito proclaiming with banners and chants "I am a Forajido too".

However, and having in mind the highly unstable institutional landscape in Ecuador, besides the studies available about the subject, there were more underlying factors driving the country towards possibly its deepest political crisis in years.

First of all, it has to be stressed that this was basically a general politico-institutional crisis. The economic performance of the country couldn't be considered as one of the most important causes. Supported by high oil prices and emigrants' remittances, Ecuador's economy was growing by a rate of 8.21% in 2004 and of 5.29% in 2005. In contrast, the previous revolts of 1997 and mainly of 2000, exhibited a clear relationship between the economy and politics, with political and social actors strongly denouncing the government as the responsible for the sudden decline of income (2000) or for raising taxes and pushing social cutbacks (1997). Thus, Ecuadoreans didn't experience the country's economy in a particularly bad shape in 2005 and 2006 compared to the previous years, according to Latinobarómetro data²⁶.

Another important element to bear in mind, again compared to the 1997 and 2000 crises, appears in the fact that there was not a clear political actor directing the protests in 2005. If the role of the indigenous movement and political elites were key in the fall of Bucaran in 1997, and Mahuad in 2000 (Córdova, 2003; Ibarra, 1997), the influence of specific social movements and those elites in 2005 was almost absent, although the indigenous organizations showed some sympathy and engaged with the events by the end of the process. As Ramirez puts it (2005: 11), the so-called Forajidos Revolt was for the first

²⁶ The worst negative views recorded about the national economy were 2000, 2001 and 2003, according to Latinobarómetro; the worst years with negative opinion about the respondents own economic situation were 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004.

time in contemporary Ecuador “a movement without any political organized direction”. Also, this was not at the beginning a ‘national’ crisis, but a Quito crisis –confirming the traditionally fragmented nature of Ecuadorean politics– which spread out to the Sierra region first, and next to the rest of the country. Finally, this was a mostly urban middle-class phenomenon, although at some point other social segments and classes came along adding their demands to the headless Forajido movement (Ramírez: 35-38).

Additionally, it is important to highlight that the ‘Forajido Revolt’ was not an isolated event in recent Ecuadorean history. Deep political and institutional crises had been haunting the country for years, at least since the *Feriado Bancario*, or the financial crisis of 1999, president Bucaram’s deposition in 1997, or even before. Actually, we may claim that 2005 was a sort of end of the road of a process of institutional deterioration that had been brewing in Ecuador for years. If we look at the level of confidence of Ecuadoreans in institutions, opinion polls from Latinobarometro²⁷ couldn’t be clearer. Confidence in Congress was ‘none’ or ‘little’ for 84% of respondents in 2005. This situation was basically the same at least since 2000, or the late 90s, with ‘little’ or ‘none’ views dominating the polls. Something similar happened with ‘Political Parties’; confidence in this crucial institution for liberal democracies was practically non-existent in 2005, as well as in the previous years, particularly in 2003:

²⁷ Many of this chapter’s claims are supported by evidence provided by Latinobarometro’s opinion polls. Given the importance of this source, I compared Latinobarometro’s results with another available although less systematic source of data from the region, the Latin American Public Opinion Project at the Vanderbilt University. Outcomes compared from 2004 and 2006 produced highly similar results in both datasets.

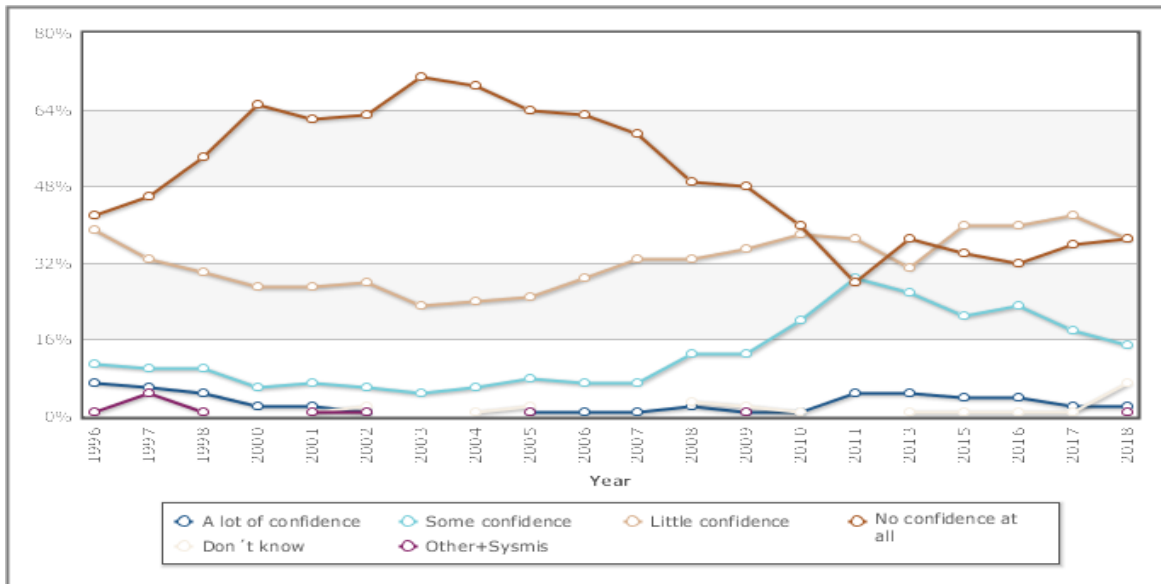


Figure 1.1: Confidence in Political Parties (Source: Latinobarometro)

It is important to notice that 2003 and 2004 were very often the worst years in terms of confidence for a number of institutions. Lucio Gutiérrez, who was elected president in 2002, followed an erratic policy renouncing many of his campaign promises (such as denouncing IMF’s neoliberal policies or solving the nation’s endemic corruption) and broke his political alliances with progressive parties that supported his candidacy, remarkably with Pachakutik, the political branch of the indigenous movement. Gutierrez, in fact, got closer to Guayaquil’s Partido Social Cristiano and followed politics as usual probably spreading a sentiment of general disappointment against any political institution throughout the population. For instance, confidence in the Justice system hit a low in 2003, and trust in the President reflected the minimum score in 2004:

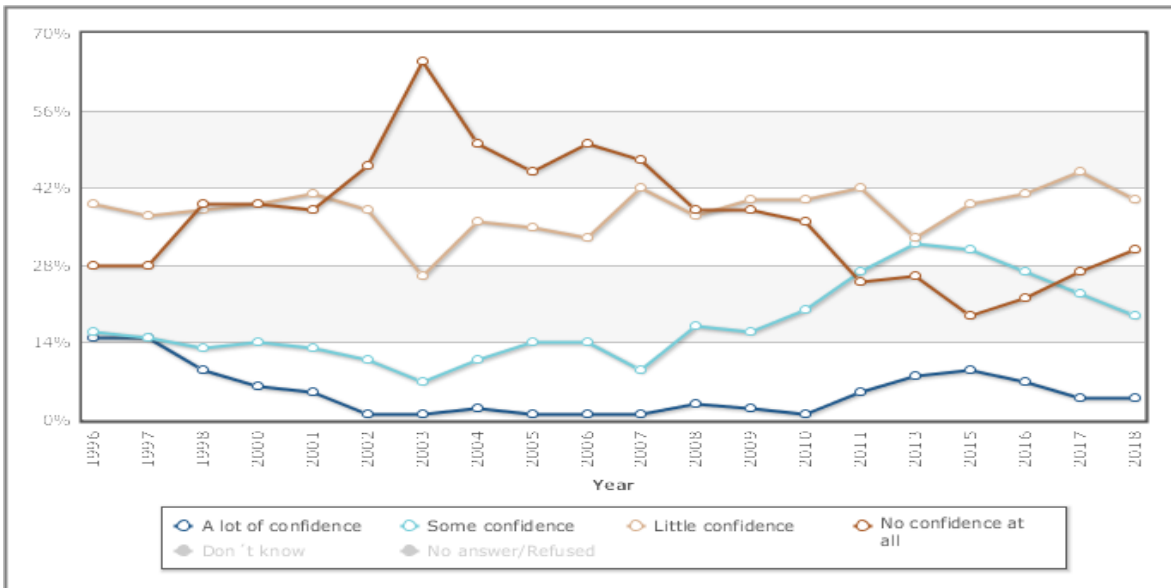


Figure 1.2: Confidence in the Judiciary (Source: Latinobarometro)

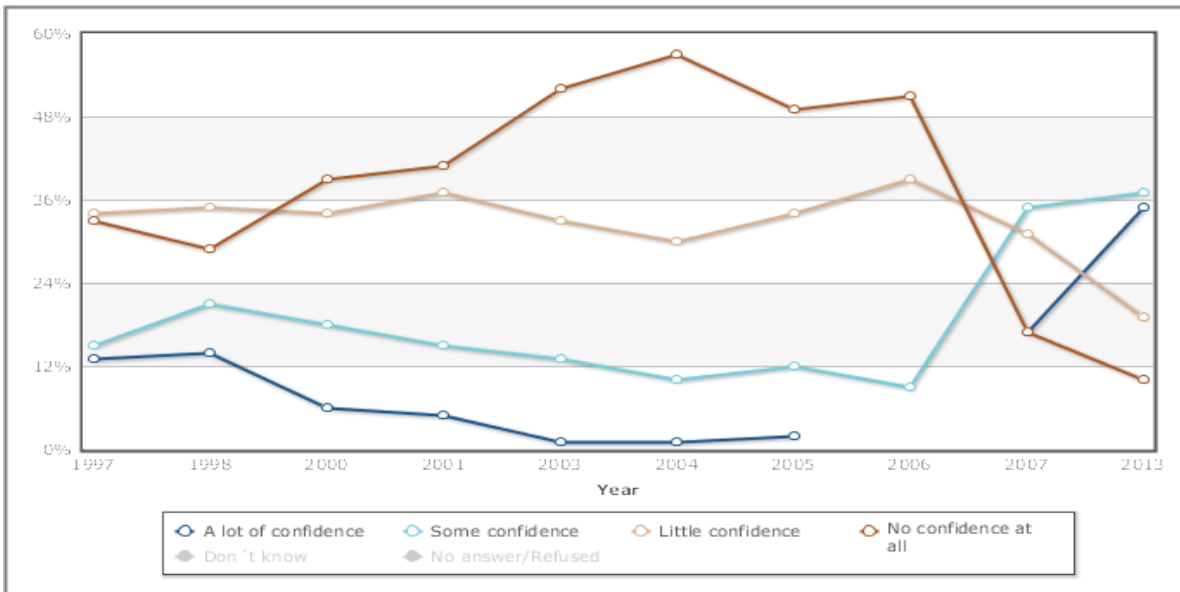


Figure 1.3: Confidence in the President (Source: Latinobarometro)

Other ‘political’ institutions, such as the ‘military’ or the ‘police’, got similar very low scores, especially in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Some ‘sociopolitical’ institutions or actors, depending on the perspective, such as ‘private companies’ (66% of participants

responded ‘little’ or ‘none’ confidence in them in 2005), banks (74% or ‘little’ or ‘none’ confidence in the same year) or unions (74%, curiously the same percentage) scored also minimum confidence. Even the Catholic Church, traditionally supported by the majority of the Ecuadorean society, received its worst scores in 2003, but improved sharply in 2005. Although these results reflect the national universe, data referring to Quito, the capital center of demonstrations of April, were similar or even worse, supporting consistently the idea that Quito’s sentiment was representative or even more radical than the national public opinion. But on top of that, it was politics and political institutions that took the weight of the rejection. As a matter of fact, in a country where individuals usually respond that unemployment is the major problem in the nation, 2005 appeared as the exception: in that year the ‘political situation’ overcame the lack of jobs as the first problem of the nation for the population.

Finally, media, clearly a sociopolitical institution, also suffered the lack of confidence during the years preceding 2005 and 2006. ‘None’ or ‘little’ trust in television raised to 66% of the population in 2003, compared to 46% in the previous year; that number remained at the 57% and 53% in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Levels of confidence in newspapers were also extremely low in 2003 (68% of Ecuadoreans had ‘little’ or ‘none’ confidence in the press) and 2004 (65%), rising a little in 2005 (‘only’ 54% of none or little confidence) to decline sharply in 2006 (75% of little or no confidence). Data about radio were similar for 2003 (67% of low or no confidence), marking a big change from 2001 (with only 41% of low or no confidence); numbers improved in 2005 (52% of low or no confidence) and 2006 (55%). We will see later how a key factor contributing to the

stimulation and coordination of the Forajido revolt was actually one specific alternative medium, Radio La Luna, which in turn would play a significant part in the improvement of radio's reputation, especially when a number of other radios started to follow La Luna's path in denouncing the political situation. In any case, we see again here the special quality of 2003 as probably the worst year in terms of reputation for a number of institutions.

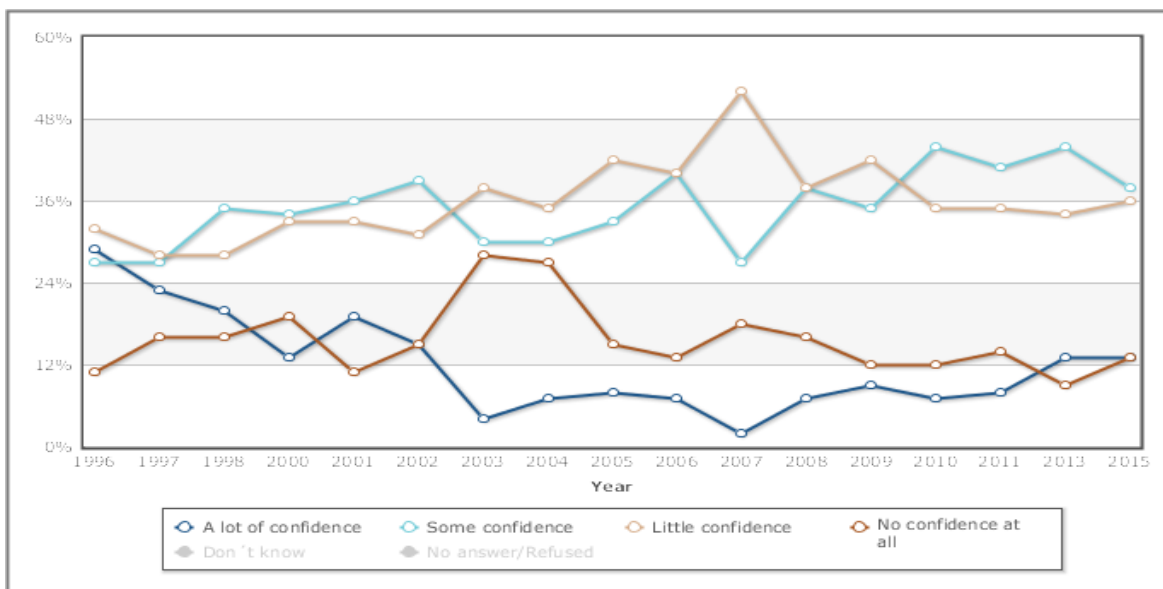


Figure 1.4: Confidence in Television broadcasting (Source: Latinobarometro)

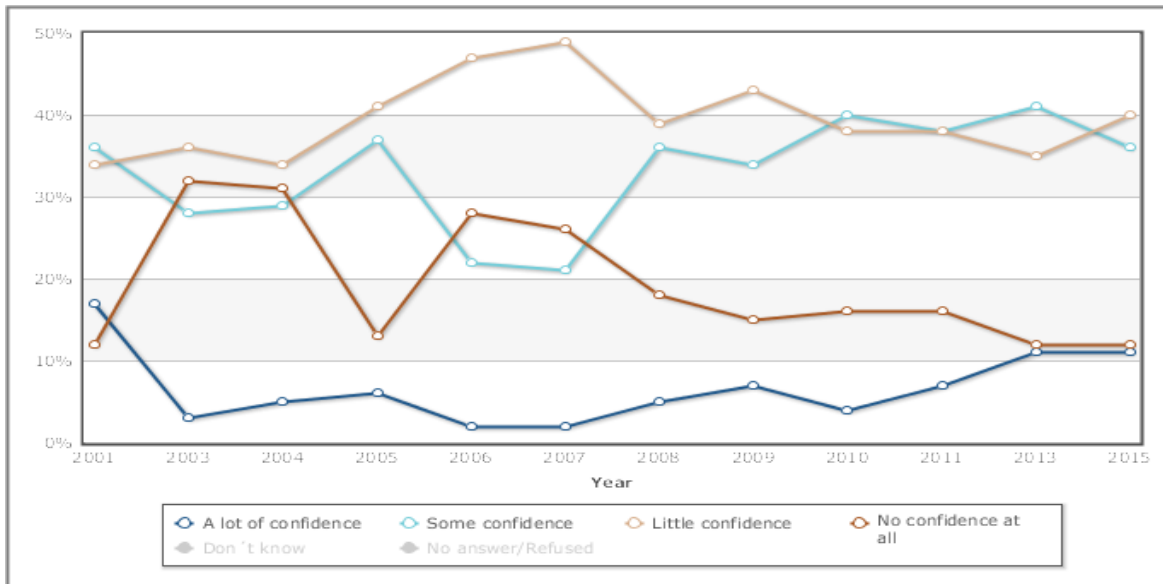


Figure 1.5: Confidence in Newspapers (Source: Latinobarometro)

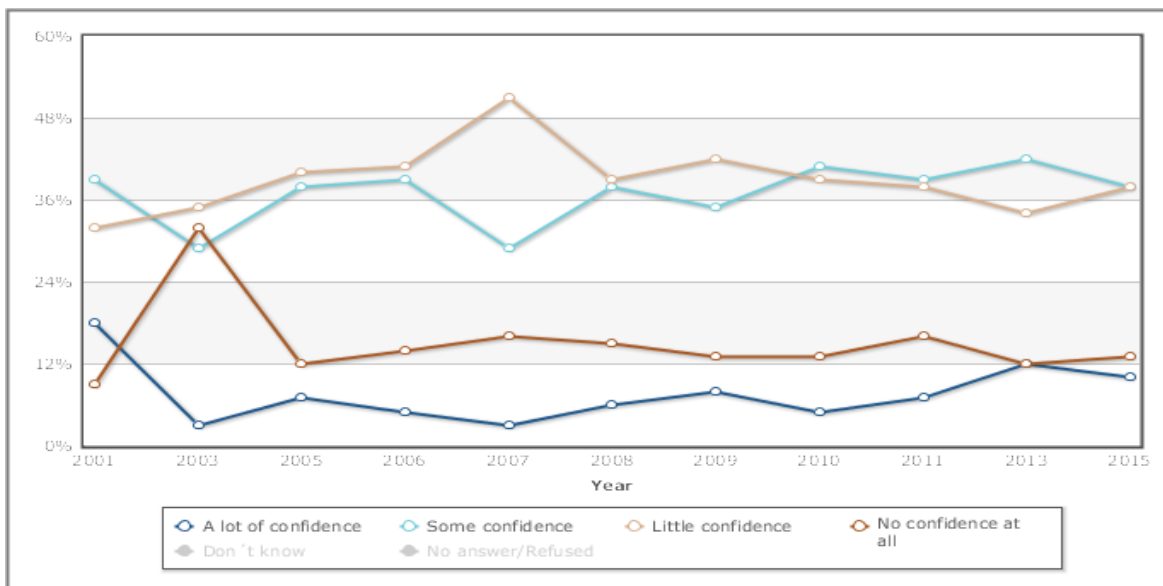


Figure 1.6: Confidence in Radio broadcasting (Source: Latinobarometro)

On another note, the April demonstrations, preceded by politically directed marches in Guayaquil (promoted by the mayor and his party, the PSC) and in Quito (also endorsed by the mayor, from Izquierda Democrática) don't seem to be originated in an unusual

involvement of citizens in political or social participation or activism. Latinobarometro data describes an Ecuadorean society detached from politics and activism, by no means anticipating an eruption of social movements. In 2005, 80% of the individuals were 'little' or 'not interested' in politics (the percentage was a striking 82% in Quito), and 75% of Ecuadorean knew 'little' or 'nothing' about social and political events in their country, a figure lower in the capital; also, Ecuadoreans spoke way less about politics in 2005 than in the 1990s. Also, their participation in social movements or demonstrations had not increased in the last years; it actually had decrease, compared to data before 2000; individuals' participation in protests (authorized or not authorized) had dropped, as well as more violent forms, such as land occupation or blocking traffic. It seems very contradictory that such disruptive events, capable of overthrowing a government in 2005, were preceded by an apparent social demobilization. Some questions may arise about Latinobarometro's sampling, the survey design, or the interviewers' work, since the 2005's social disruption can't be detected by political activism data, but an evident picture of a society brutally detached from a number of institutions remains, and possibly, a substance of clear dismay about politics as it was commonly understood by the average citizen.

But the events occurred, and between April 13 to April 20, Quito's citizens massively took the streets, provoking a huge political and constitutional crisis. Quito's downtown was blocked, public spaces were filled with people marching and protesting; the capital's Cathedral was even occupied during the peak of the demonstrations. Creative chants, humoristic slogans and innovative banners emerged in the streets where people denounced the government by singing, shouting, or hitting their pans. Cell-phone applications that

became popular in that period such as SMS also played an important role, especially in self-called assemblies and demonstrations, avoiding mainstream and institutional ways of convening that the government could detect and control²⁸. Gutiérrez announced the state of emergency the 15th, but protests didn't cease. Next, the president called out his followers through clientelist nets from the countryside to defend his mandate and the capital saw warlike scenes with guns and rifles brought by *Gutierrista* followers. An Ecuadorean-Chilean photographer died from a stroke, several individuals were wounded, and tension rose dangerously.

The memory of Argentina's protests in 2001 was extremely present in Quito in 2005. Striking parallelisms from the power vacuum experimented in Buenos Aires during the so-called Corralito of 2001²⁹ hunted Ecuador. On April 20, once Lucio Gutiérrez, already unsupported by the military, had escaped from the presidential palace by helicopter, some members of the national parliament tried to designate another president in a hurried call to convene at Ciespal headquarters³⁰. That day, as Hurtado (2005) describes, without Gutiérrez

²⁸ Cellphones and SMS already played an important role in popular demonstrations in Spain on March 13, 2004, right after the Madrid Attacks and one day before general elections of that year. This event was experienced by the large community of Ecuadoreans immigrants in Spain and has been widely studied; perhaps the most known international analysis linking new communication technologies and new mass movements has been made by Manuel Castells (2009). Castells' argument about an emerging difference between an old vertical communication tied to the pre-communication technologies era, and a new freer and headless condition of what he calls "self-communication" is supported by cases such as the massive anti-Iraq war demonstrations throughout Europe in 2002 and the 13-M protests in Madrid in 2004. They could easily be expanded to the Ecuadorean case, although Castells' awe regarding "self-communication processes" is probably exaggerated. The Forajidos case and its aftermath demonstrate that several media institutions took a position in the process, and "self-communication", in any case, would be confined to very specific moments.

²⁹ There are remarkable similarities between the massive demonstrations in Buenos Aires in December 2001 and Quito in April 2005. The Argentinian crisis, more directly associated with economic variables, also produced a deep political crisis and during a few weeks the country lived a full vacuum power, which ended in the deposition of two presidents. It was also violent: 38 individuals deceased in clashes with security forces during the protests (Cossutta, 2012).

³⁰ For a study which is basically a discussion about the relations between media and politics is at the very least ironical that the place where a new president came to power amid the revolt/coup of 2005 was named Centro

in the presidency, and with the new president, Alfredo Palacio, recently designated, the country lived long stressful hours with an interim government encircled and harassed by hundreds of individuals, some of them repeating the motto “¡Que se vayan todos!” (Throw them all out!³¹), and some of them defending Gutiérrez’s legitimacy as the true Ecuadorean president. Palacio remained hidden in Ciespal’s basement for almost 12 hours, until he received a call of support from the PSC leader in Guayaquil and former president, León Febres-Cordero³². That same day and the days after, a new cabinet made of a diverse representation of the country took the reins of the nation; one of the new ministers, Rafael Correa, introduced himself to the public opinion as a “Ministro forajido”.

In sum, the Forajido Revolt, spurred by a formal constitutional crisis when Gutiérrez intervened the judiciary branch, displayed a more complex situation beyond that relevant legal challenge. By 2005 and the preceding years, the Ecuadorean society was basically detached from almost any institution in the country, with only the exception of the Catholic Church. The revolt was, furthermore, a non-coordinated or directed protest, alien to any existing political organization, unveiling thus the deepest political crisis in Ecuador’s contemporary history. In this way, the Forajidos not only denounced Gutiérrez’s government, but all administrations, politicians and even many social and political organizations; the cry “Que se vayan todos” was insistent during demonstrations. On the

Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina (Ciespal). I asked about this aspect to many informants and according to them it was not premeditated nor had nothing to do with the process. Ciespal was the place of the meeting because it was basically one of the few buildings with an auditorium able to convene this kind of conference of around a hundred of elected representatives. In this case, I applied myself the Freudian mantra by which “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar”.

³¹ “Throw them all out”, in English, a slogan also extracted from the demonstrations in Argentina’s Corralito of 2001.

³² As Palacio himself states in a documentary produced by Ecuavisa in 2015 remembering the Forajido’s revolt legacy in Ecuadorean politics.

other hand, the economic situation was not directly involved in the immediate causes of the uprising; the Ecuadorean GDP was increasing strongly since 2003, and Gutiérrez's government didn't pass new taxes or pushed social cutbacks. It was thus a deep political and institutional crisis in a country which had already lived two deep economic and political crises at least since 1997. It was a full representation crisis, in other words. A situation in which the society was demanding drastic change but without clear ways to channel it, given the wide rejection of politics and political parties. One might say that this was the perfect situation for populism, a full populist moment, but how it would be manifested was a different although essential conversation. Ecuadoreans overwhelmingly chose populism in the 2006 election, but within a very specific media context. Before the election, a discussion was addressed about what to do with a rotten political system. And that discussion was obviously in the society, and in the media in all their varieties, since both alternative and mainstream media played a key role in the process interacting with an emerging populist leader: Rafael Correa.

2.- Full 'media populism'

As it was discussed above, the 2005 crisis was basically a political-institutional crisis or, in other words, a crisis of representation: citizens didn't see themselves represented in the institutions, and even expressed a strong alienation regarding political activism. That crisis was pretty embedded in Ecuadorean society, especially since the late 1990s, but exploded in a particular way in Quito in April 2005. There are not specific attitudinal data collected from Ecuadorean society during those years, but it wouldn't be a wild

consideration to think that given the sociopolitical conditions, populist attitudes would have skyrocketed in the Andean nation in all those years. There is a body of political theory that associates representation crises with the rise of populism (Gandesha, 2018; Rosanvallon, 2015; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019; Roberts, 2021) and the overall approach of this study sides considerably with that approach; that is to say, populism's rise cannot be understood without considering a crisis of representation. Laclau (2005) is possibly the author who has elaborated the most sophisticated theoretical approach supported by that representation crisis triggering populism. For Laclau, that crisis seems to be explained by dysfunctional discourses expressing institutional settings unable to respond to social demands; that fracture, between what the current institutions offer and what the society asks, detonates a "logic of equivalence" (Laclau, 2005: 73-83) transforming those demands into a political articulation around 'frontiers' dividing society between the people and its enemy. One might say that this split had been present in the Ecuadorean society for years. Gutiérrez, who would be labeled as a traitor by many of the demonstrators in 2005, was elected in 2002 as a populist candidate, closer to the indigenous movement and to other progressive organizations, rejecting the old political apparatus of the country embodied by Partido Social Cristiano and Izquierda Democrática. However, Gutiérrez (as happened with Abdalá Bucaram in 1997) rejected many of his electoral promises and partnered with the old political class (particularly the PSC) just months after being sworn as president. Yet, the populist magma that contributed to Gutiérrez's electoral victory remained there when the former colonel was ousted. Data available in Latinobarometro polls from those years may illustrate the populist sentiment in Ecuador; for instance, authoritarian or 'illiberal' views increased

among the Ecuadoreans, especially between years 2001 and 2005; the same occurred with the Ecuadoreans' discontent with democracy, which reached 56% of individuals in 2002 and 2003.

That being said, another way to observe whether populism was spread in the society could be to focus on the media, searching for clues of what Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann (2017: 367-371) call 'media populism'. I believe that this systematic approach, connected to the argument of the key role played by the media in Correa's election, explains what distinguished populism in the Ecuador of 2005-2006 compared to previous experiences, and more importantly, how Correa's relationship with media was especially relevant from the very beginning, marking his entire political career. More specifically, this 'media populism' conceptualization, defined as the way media reflect populist ideas³³, distinguishes three perspectives to explain the association between populism and the media. First, with what they call *populism by the media*, populism is consciously disseminated by some media, using populist stances, such as the conflict between the people and the elites or out-groups, including immigrants and minorities. In this case, "media organizations are actively engaging in their own kind of populism" (367) although the sources of these populist ideas can be varied, from media anti-elitist traditions to commercial goals reflected in the use of populist styles (v.g. tabloids or tabloidization of news media, etc.). Secondly, by *populism*

³³ A conceptualization, it must be highlighted, that is designed and thought from and within the European context by European researchers (Aalberg et al. 2017). The use of this methodology is scarce outside Europe and may bring challenges when populist leaders are in power and can reform or influence media. In any case, this classification may be especially useful to observe the spread of populism in Ecuador before Correa came to power, and can help to characterize populism in the media when a powerful populist actor is in power, as we will see in chapters 5 and 6.

through the media these authors mean a context in which populist actors may convey their values (reflected in slogans, programs and their overall discourse) via mainstream media, which although not ideologically aligned with the populists, disseminate their message due to populism's potential for commercial media or audience attention; or, in other words, a situation in which "there is a convergence of goals, which is usually unintentional, between the "production logic" of commercialized media and of populist political movements" (369). Finally, *populist citizen journalism* emerges when the reception of messages and views from the public/audience may introduce populist ideas in media. This situation happens, the authors explain, when media outlets "open their gates. . . to reader's comments and blogs" (371) importing a populism that in the cases analyzed by these authors (European right-wing populism, basically) tend to adopt the form of hate toward specific out-groups such as the Roma people or Muslims immigrants. Following these three types of relations, we will see how the Ecuadorean media in 2005 and 2006 met those categories or, in other words, how Ecuador lived a moment of 'full media populism' adapted to the local context which eventually would be remarkably linked to Rafael Correa's victory in 2006.

2.1.- La Luna and populist citizen journalism

To start, let's analyze the case of Radio La Luna. This alternative medium, directed and created by journalist Paco Velasco in 1997, was active during the 1999-2000 revolts after the *Feriado Bancario* and played a key role in the propagation and coordination of the Forajido Revolt. A number of sources, such as research articles (Velasco, 2000; Hurtado, 2005; Ramírez, 2005; Checa-Godoy 2012; Freidenberg, 2015; Kitzberger, 2016), newspaper

stories (consulted at *Hoy*, *El Comercio* or *El Universo* newspapers) and remarks from journalists active in those years, confirmed Radio La Luna's role in the 2005 revolts. Most of the sources, pointed out La Luna's combative position as well in a previous social insurrection: president Mahuad's deposition through a confusing coup supported by a popular uprising in 2000 (Córdova, 2003)³⁴. Thus, La Luna's role as a partisan media actor in the political process was not new in 2005 and collected diverse opinions about its actual position in the political process³⁵.

In any case, diverse voices of the Ecuadorean society presented their views in Velasco's shows, talking about politics and other current issues in many different fields, from the economy to arts and music. La Luna's critical stance about Gutiérrez's government turned into open denunciation after Gutiérrez intervened the justice system in late 2004 and pardoned Abdalá Bucaram in February 2005. In the meantime, most of mainstream media didn't represent any of the protests that expanded since the first mobilizations after March.

³⁴ In her interesting comparative analysis of Bucaram's and Mahuad's coups, Córdova (2003) claims that Mahuad's deposition after the 1999 financial crisis was inevitable and was planned accordingly by part of the political elite (notably by political leaders of Partido Social Cristiano in Guayaquil, including former president León Febres-Cordero). However, the planned succession, which was similar to the one that ousted Bucaram in 1997, was disrupted by the role of the indigenous movement and some elements of the Army that broke into the parliament in January 2000. Radio La Luna, as Velasco himself recounts (2000), was inside the parliament when those events happened; those protests were probably well supported by a great percentage of the population. After some hours of tension and confusion, the plan to succeed Mahuad was imposed. One of the main characters during those moments was a young mestizo colonel, Lucio Gutiérrez; his rise during the turmoil was compared to Hugo Chávez's first appearances in Venezuelan politics.

³⁵ For instance, former director of Radio Pública del Ecuador, Giovanna Tassi, who at that time worked for newspaper *Hoy* and collaborated with some community media at the Oriente region, recalled very critically La Luna's active support of the Forajido movement. "We never incited violence, which is different of what happened with the Forajidos' revolt and La Luna. . . it played a role with which I mostly disagreed because you don't know exactly what the people who are listening to you are capable to do; I always say that we are both means of massive destruction and means of massive construction", she explained. Raquel Escobar, also a former editor at Radio Nacional Pública with experience in community radio, remarked La Luna's position as well in the Forajido revolts and in Correa's rising through Alberto Acosta's acquaintance with Paco Velasco, La Luna's director: "Acosta opened the doors of Radio La Luna to Rafael Correa, who showed himself as a very charismatic individual", said Escobar

Probably, the absence of any other space or medium to expose the situation transformed La Luna into some sort of people's media, or, following the media populism literature, into a case of *populist citizen journalism*. For instance, Ramírez's (2005) analysis, published two months after the crisis, reflects the depth of that role and relations between society and that specific medium:

“The ‘cacerolazo’ (‘big pan hitting’) on the night of Wednesday 13, the ‘reventón’ (‘the big burst’), the ‘tablazo’ (‘the big hit with a board’), the ‘yucazo’ (‘the big hit’) . . . emerged as individual initiatives from numerous radio listeners, who staying tuned to the communicative space opened by Radio La Luna –and its host, Paco Velasco, with a long career in alternative media–, formulated innovative proposals to resist collectively to the degraded dominant political order. It might be calculated more than 9,000 phone calls (6,000 on April Sunday 17, according to Velasco) and hundreds of Quiteños’ visits to the radio’s headquarters during ten consecutive days, aiming to express publicly their analyses of the events, their more intimate feelings of rejection of the President and the political class in general, and their ideas for the ongoing days of protest” (28).

In sum, Radio La Luna played a role as a medium encouraging and organizing protest or promoting debates denouncing the corruption and deterioration of Ecuador's political system; but what probably happened to be more fascinating was the relation of openness to views and voices from ordinary citizens that characterized La Luna's special position. Once the path of protest was open, many other radios, most of them privately owned, such as Radio Democracia or Tarqui (Ramírez, 31), followed La Luna's example denouncing Gutiérrez's government and the Ecuadoran political class, but none of them established that special almost bonding connection with ordinary people. It must be recalled that during the protests and events around Mahuad's deposition, La Luna didn't play this peculiar task of

giving the voice directly to the people. As mentioned before, Rafael Correa participated in many of the shows of the station, as did other Ecuadorean intellectuals, such as Alberto Acosta, one of Correa's first allies; however, the novelty in 2005 was that *everybody*, whoever wanted to express herself, was welcomed and encouraged to participate. The common formula those days was that citizens said their name, dictated their identification number as a gesture of transparency refuting the government's claims of foreign intervention, and narrated their experience, comments, or advice regarding the events.

Furthermore, the radio helped to organize and to shape the ongoing demonstrations. The combination of SMS shared among the participants and Radio La Luna's broadcasting dramatically conditioned the revolts. Surprisingly the station couldn't be blocked by the government although some efforts to shut the radio down were recorded in the days before the deposition, and in April 20 gunshots were fired at the walls of the building; in those days, hundreds of Quiteños took turns to protect the station from being closed³⁶. Many citizens called to the station to propose methods, slogans, new and better places for demonstrations or fresh strategies and tactics aiming to bringing down the government *and* the whole political system. No political organization, with or without parliamentary representation, tried to capitalize or clearly endorsed those demonstrations and broadcastings. Some 'professional politicians' participated in Velasco's main show, *La Clave*, but they were far from influencing or controlling the station or the program: the protest itself appeared above

³⁶ About these attempts of closing the station and other aggressions, there is not too much information, save some notes from Reporters Without Frontiers, see more at <https://rsf.org/es/noticias/visita-inesperada-del-ministro-de-estado-los-locales-de-radio-luna>. Larrea (2005) offered his own experience relating these efforts and La Luna's role during the events in a long article posted online at Red Voltaire. See more at <https://www.voltairenet.org/article124726.html>

the ordinary political struggle among the elites and established organizations. La Luna's autonomous role in the events and the station's importance was so dramatic that one of the two phone calls that the recently designated president Alfredo Palacio made while hiding in Ciespal building's basement, waiting for the protests to cool down, was directed to Paco Velasco, asking for help. The other phone call targeted former president and Partido Social Cristiano's leader, León Febres-Cordero.

The covering of the events continued after Gutiérrez was ousted and the new government was formed. With the colonel out of the country, exiled in Colombia, Velasco even had to leave the country for some months amidst threats to his life and that of his family, but he returned soon to his position at the station³⁷. La Luna, which was imitated in its formula by a number of radios, was transformed into a sort of a legend of the Ecuadorean radio. Even the *New York Times* echoed the role of the "small Ecuadorean Radio FM", as the American newspaper called it³⁸, during the protests. Furthermore, Paco Moncayo and a large part of his staff in La Luna would be part of Correa's first governments and played a role in the constituent process of 2007-2008, regarding media and communication policy. Before all that happened, of course, Radio La Luna supported Correa's candidacy in the 2006 elections. Moncayo himself would become Alianza Pais' representative in the national parliament and minister of culture until 2012. Iconic La Luna radio station would disappear as such in 2010, turned into a sports radio station.

³⁷ About Velasco's adventures and a short story about Radio La Luna and its connections with the Forajidos and Correa's Citizens Revolution, see more at <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/avivo-y-eclipso-a.html>

³⁸ The *New York Times* version of Gutierrez's deposition and La Luna's role on the protests is available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/20/international/americas/ecuador-president-is-ousted-after-protests.html>

2.2.- Populism through the legacy press

The second case of media populism in Ecuador is related to elite media, and in this instance the association between populist ideas and the press may be characterized as a clear case of *populism through the media*. Here we examine, mostly, how non-populist media (defined by their pro-establishment ideology or their non-sensationalist/tabloid style and format) convey populist ideas or cover populist actors *in spite of their own professional and ideological principles*. However, these legacy newspapers' commercial incentives (since covering populist ideas may increase readership) or populist actors' strong pervasiveness and influence in the society, very often oblige these reluctant media to cover and reflect populist ideas. Evidence suggests that the two most important newspapers in Ecuador, *El Comercio*, based in Quito, and *El Universo*, established in Guayaquil, disseminated populist content in Ecuador in 2005 and 2006. The favorite press for elites in the political and economic centers of the country, these news companies have been regarded as the most read and influential press in the country, mostly in their respective region of influence³⁹. Both newspapers, owned by the same families for decades, have been usually associated to local-regional interests (conservative landowners from the Sierra in the case of *El Comercio*; pro free trade merchants in the coast for *El Universo*) although their connections with political

³⁹ There are not official data about newspapers' audience/readership in Ecuador (only restricted data, held by the company Kantar Ibope to which this study couldn't have access to) although there is some non-systematic information regarding their circulation. Viveros and Mellado (2018) account a circulation of 125,000 and 112,000 for *El Comercio* and *El Universo*; Checa-Godoy (2012) points out a circulation of 100,000 and 120,000 respectively, whereas Jordan and Panchana (2009) cite a diffusion of 126,000 copies for *El Comercio* and 149,000 for *El Universo*. In any case, only one other newspaper, the tabloid *Extra*, edited by Granasa company, can compete with those numbers with an average circulation of 340,000 copies (Jordan and Panchana, 2009). Interviewed in 2018, Juan Manuel Yepes, *Extra*'s editor-in-chief, calculated a lower circulation for his newspaper with an average of 115,000 copies.

parties in the unstable Ecuadorean political system are not clear. In any case, they are normally associated with conservative ideas and policies⁴⁰, and very far from supporting populist actors in the country such as Bucaram or Gutiérrez.

However, some populist content was observed in those media, especially in the period in which the Forajidos made the frontpages of many newspapers. Drawing from the longitudinal content analysis of both newspapers, data from 2005 and 2006 produced a very interesting picture of how populist ideas were reflected right before Correa came to power. Based on the most agreed definition of populism set up by Mudde (2004), this study looked at references to the people and to the enemy as two ‘populist’ variables in both newspapers during those years. Mentions to the people were classified using diverse expressions in Spanish⁴¹ and associated with a number of contexts especially meaningful for the Ecuadorean and Latin American context, such as ‘nation’, ‘*patria*’, ‘indigenous nationalities or *pueblos originarios*’ or ‘citizenship’, besides positive or negative connotations. References to the people’s enemy followed the same contextual logic and were divided into several options, from mentions to the rich or the oligarchy, to the political class, specific social groups or some foreign powers.

⁴⁰ Some informants (Orlando Pérez, *El Telégrafo*’s former director; or Raquel Escobar, editor at Radio Nacional Pública) associated *El Universo* to Partido Social Cristiano, whereas other interviewees (Andersson Boscan, editor at *La Posta* and an anonymous reporter at *Expreso*) tended to link Guayaquil’s *Expreso* with Jaime Nebot, Partido Social Cristiano’s indisputable leader. Results derived from content analysis of *El Comercio* and *El Universo* pointed out to some political parallelism between *El Universo* and Partido Social Cristiano leaders although not in a consistent way, sharing presence with leaders of other parties. As for *El Comercio*, the same interviewees associated its editorial line with a conservative/catholic tradition and with Mauricio Rodas, Quito mayor until 2019 and leader of center-right party, Suma. The presence or absence of political parallelism in the Ecuadorean press is examined as a central subject in chapters 6 and 7.

⁴¹ In Ecuador references to el pueblo (the people) can fall under terms such as ‘gente’, ‘patria’, ‘raza’, etc.

Table 1.1: People's mentions in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*

	2005	2006	2015	2016	2018
N/A	167 (87%)	177 (92.2%)	162 (84.4%)	165 (85.9%)	156 (81.3%)
Positive connot.	8 (4.2%)	10 (5.2%)	8 (4.2%)	15 (7.8%)	11 (5.7%)
Negative connot.	0	0	0	0	4 (2.1%)
People as nation	3 (1.6%)	0	4 (2.1%)	1 (0.5%)	0
People as citizens.	3 (1.6%)	0	0	0	0
People as poor	0	1 (0.5%)	0	0	0
People specific	3 (1.6%)	0	4 (2.1%)	4 (2.1%)	7 (3.6%)
People neutral	6 (3.1%)	3 (1.6%)	14 (7.3%)	7 (3.6%)	12 (6.3%)
Other	2 (1.0%)	1 (0.5%)	0	0	2 (1.0%)
Total	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)

Table 1.2: Enemy's mentions in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*

	2005	2006	2015	2016	2018
N/A	176 (91.7%)	183 (95.3%)	185 (96.4%)	187 (97.4%)	184 (95.8%)
Rich/Oligarchy	3 (1.6%)	0	0	0	0
Political Class	12 (6.3%)	7 (3.6%)	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
Correa	0	0	7 (3.6%)	1 (0.5%)	7 (3.6%)
Corrupt people	1 (0.5%)	2 (1.0%)	0	3 (1.6%)	0
Total	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)	192 (100%)

As we can see by the number of references, combining mentions to the people and to the people's enemy, 2005 was the most populist year. Although in general the number of references is very low. This score, however, has to be put into perspective. These news media, both *El Comercio* and *El Universo*, were highly specialized and elitist in the Ecuadorean context –this study will discuss further aspects regarding these media's use of

sources, subjects covered and professional practices in chapters 5 and 6– and it is very relevant that even under those conditions populist messages were able to emerge. On the other hand, the form in which populist content arose, *malgré soi*, is meaningful. References to the people were mostly spread in a similar rate throughout the years, with Correa in power, and with Moreno’s government, but the combination of diverse mentions of the people along with the enemy makes the 2005 scenario especial.

There were 17 positive mentions to the people in 2005 (out of a sample of 192 articles for each year), 11 in 2006, 16 in 2015, 20 in 2016 and 18 in 2018; however, when combining those mentions with references to an enemy (a dimension, let’s recall, key to detect populism’s ‘us versus and them’ basic rhetoric), years 2005 and 2015 are the more meaningful periods. Indeed, it is 2005, the big year of discontent, when we see more enemy mentions (16 in total), referring, above all, to ‘the political class’ (12), ‘the oligarchy’ (3) and ‘the corrupts’ (1), incorporating the core ‘anti-elitist’ dimension here defined by a dialectic between the people and the political elites and oligarchies. Something similar happened in 2006, with most references centered on ‘the political class’ (7) and ‘the corrupts’ (2). In 2015 the people’s enemy, according to *El Comercio* and *El Universo* pages, would be, mainly, Correa (3) and the government (4), headed by Rafael Correa himself. With Correa out of power, in 2018, the former president would repeat as the main enemy of the people. Following that logic, combining people mentions with the enemy references, 2016 would be the least populist year. *El Comercio* published a little bit more populist content than *El Universo* (2 pieces more in average), perhaps due to this newspaper’s physical and

contextual proximity to Ecuador's government institutions and most of the demonstrations against government's policies.

If we analyze further those mentions and combinations, we see how most of them were published as an opinion piece, with some nuances depending on the year. In 2005, 12 of those references were written by an author (a university professor, a journalist, a popular writer, etc.) versus 8 stories written in other genres and in other sections in which journalists covered populist actors or populist phenomena (such as the Forajidos revolt, for instance). In 2006 the weight of this genre in determining the type of populist content was almost complete: 9 out of 10 mentions to the enemy were published as opinion pieces. In 2015 the genre was a little more distributed with some news stories and interviews depicting references about the people's enemies; in 2016, the year with less references, almost all of them appeared in opinion pieces; in 2018 only a couple of mentions appeared out of the opinion genre (opinion section and 'analysis' stories within the Politics section). In brief, overall speaking save 2005, where the enemy references appeared more distributed between news and opinion pieces, in the rest of the years (including 2006), populist content seemed to be something related to opinion –which makes sense, since these elite media tend to avoid not populist/sensationalist communication–, and 2005 was the year with most populist phenomena to cover, if we understand, of course, the Forajidos' revolt (and its aftermath) under the rubric of populist demonstrations, or part of a larger phenomenon of populist social movements⁴².

⁴² Both Collins (2014), directly studying the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia, and Aslanidis (2017), building on a theory of populism as a logic of equivalence articulating specific social movements, consider the Forajidos' revolt as an example of how left-wing populism works from a bottom-up perspective, appearing first as social eruptions combining different grievances following a logic of equivalence, and crystallizing later into more

Going directly to the populist content published in 2005 and 2006, some of their headlines or titles are very informative. On January 15th, 2005, an opinion piece was published in *El Comercio* under the title ‘Strengthen citizenship’; in there, the author defended more popular participation in the political process given the clear failures of Ecuador’s political and economic system in delivering economic progress for the nation. The piece focused the discontent on a corrupt and inefficient political class. Additionally, also published that January, months before the April events, a news story covered the plans of the current ‘populist’ government headed by Lucio Gutiérrez. With the headline, ‘The government, open to improve the project to carry out the consultation’, it described the executive plans and views on a popular referendum to reform the judiciary system; here, the enemy of the people were “the oligarchy” and “the banks”, directly quoting President Gutiérrez. In February, *El Universo* also printed a couple of stories with populist content. One of them was an opinion piece, ‘The pride and the embarrassments’, narrating some popular demonstrations in Guayaquil, praising the people, and criticizing the authoritarian government without mentioning Gutiérrez. The other story, ‘Indigenous distance from government and opposition’, reported another type of populist actor, the indigenous movement, where appeals to the people abounded and the denunciation of “oligarchies” as the main antagonist dominated. It is interesting to notice that those different meanings of the people and its enemies would remain similar in 2005 and the following years. The representation of the people associated to ‘the noble nation or citizenship fighting the corrupt

specific progressive populist projects with strong and well-known leaderships, such as Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and also, Bernie Sanders in the United States, Alexis Tsipras and Yanis Varoufakis in Greece, Pablo Iglesias in Spain or Beppe Grillo in Italy.

political class' would be a dominating theme in populist content in 2005, but the other connotations would appear also in that period and the following years. For instance, the connotation 'struggle between the people and the government' would appear with Correa in the government in 2015; numerous mentions to the people will emerge again in some news articles and in-depth stories in 2015, covering demonstrations against the government led by the indigenous movement, providing a valuable clue of how populist content would evolve before and during Correa's presidency, and once the Ecuadorean leader exited the government in 2017.

But, in any case, the narrative 'people against the political class' was dominant in 2005 and 2006. For example, in April 24, just 4 days after Gutiérrez's deposition, *El Comercio* published an opinion piece titled 'Quito por la *Patria*, or Quito for Homeland', where the author, an editorial staff writer, cheered the heroic behavior of Quito's people in overthrowing Gutiérrez and focused his anger upon "most of candidates" or "the leaders who disconnect from reality once in power". A similar rationale would be present in most populist content throughout 2005 and, although with a smaller number of stories, during 2006. With titles and headlines such as 'Children expose necessities' (published in May 2005), 'Causes of national collapse' (November 2005), 'Pressure and continuity' (October 2005) or 'The voluntary vote' (December 2005), the opposition between the people and a corrupt and selfish political class is revisited in stories and opinion articles. In 2006, that constant remains. Other headlines and titles expressed very well the tone and logic behind the stories and op-eds; 'Against the racketeers' (published on February 2006), denounced the political class' dirty play to stay in power, as it happened in other stories such as 'Legal fetishism'

(May 2006), ‘Unusual candidacies’ (August 2006) or ‘The Constituent Enigma’ (October 2006), whereas ‘The dominated majority’ (March 2006) signaled the indigenous as an out-group imposing particular norms and interests against the will of the people in a rare example of something closer to the usual right-wing rhetoric. Finally, in December 2006, an opinion piece nicely synthesized the end of the road of this small but meaningful flow of populist content. Named ‘With vocation of service’, the article praised two leaders, Jaime Nebot, Guayaquil’s conservative mayor and Rafael Correa, recently elected president. After recalling Nebot’s successes leading the local government in a couple of paragraphs, the article praised Correa as that leader who understood the Ecuadorean people and “decided to be the people” or “to be authentic”. Correa won popular support, the anonymous⁴³ author of this article notices, because he contributed crucially to replace the “traditional politicians”.

In summary, specific, varied, and systematic populist content found its way to the pages of these newspapers, the most elitist and prestigious in the country. The question of whether there was a sort of a populist *zeitgeist* in Ecuador’s media before Correa came to power, particularly strong in 2005, appears thus more illuminated. During those years, the ‘people’ emerged as a positive term in those newspapers associated to nation and citizenship; and the people’s ‘enemy’ was identified, above all, by a failing political class. Finally, most likely this was a contradictory process, abnormal to the editorial line and professional practices of both newspapers. The majority of the populist content was written as opinion articles (a minority of the bulk of the editorial production) with a more balanced distribution in 2005, the most populist year. But, anyhow, there were articles and news stories reflecting

⁴³ The only opinion writer not releasing his/her identity, this strange feature may lead to think that the name originally published was probably removed years after, once Correa turned into one of *El Universo*’s fiercest enemies.

what was going on with a crystal-clear populist logic –especially related to the events around the Forajido revolt and its aftermath–, despite the traditional inertia. The values of variables other than those related to populist content confirm that elitist dimension in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*, especially before the Correa era. For instance, *El Universo*'s frontpage on April 20 ran the headline: 'Quito ousted Lucio'. There was not a single mention of *el pueblo*, the people, in that front cover.

2.3.- Sensationalist Ecuavisa, or populism by the media

The last media populism case deals with a specific television documentary produced by a private broadcasting company, Ecuavisa. Now, populist ideas are directly, consciously, supported by this medium; formally, by the cinematographic language used in the documentary, and materially, by the content expressed in it. This television show is called 'La batalla de abril' (April's battle) and it was aired in May 2005, just one month after Gutiérrez's deposition. In this audiovisual text, the narration of the events, the information provided and the format –close to American crime shows from the 1990s, or to Mexican 'Nota Roja' style of reporting– are combined to produce a very interesting and complex artifact in which populist ideas are openly addressed and agitated presumably to boost audience ratings and to disseminate certain values. Following the classification introduced above, here we deal with a clear case of *populism by the media*, delivered by a private generalist broadcaster, although tabloids and more sensationalist media are the ones that tend to fall in that category⁴⁴. This attention put on one single audiovisual text is mostly due to

⁴⁴ Wettstein et al (2018), for instance, support empirically an argument claiming that tabloids, as a media format, are the strongest media indicator of media populism.

the lack of access to systematic archives (audiovisual or printed press) from tabloids or sensationalist media available for content analysis. There is a popular tabloid in Ecuador, *Extra*⁴⁵, but it does not provide access to archives of its printed or digital issues before 2016. In any case, this single text, produced by one of the most important (and watched) private broadcasters in the country may be representative of what was disseminated in the country in generalist television, especially in 2005.

Actually, Ecuavisa has been one of the most watched stations in Ecuador for years, leading the national ratings with several shows⁴⁶. This private television's content is varied, incorporating many different programs, although the channel is widely known in the country by its news shows, such as *Televistazo*, or the documentary production 'Vision 360'. Additionally, the presenter of the documentary here analyzed, Pablo Alfonso Espinosa de los Monteros, born in Quito in 1941 and vice-president of the company, has been one of the most popular anchors in the country for decades⁴⁷, venerated as the inevitable news bearer⁴⁸. The addition of Espinosa to the project logically means that the station wanted to broadcast

⁴⁵ *Extra* was established in 1974 together with *Expreso* newspaper by Galo Martínez Merchán, a former minister during the last Velasco Ibarra governments in the late 60s and early 70s. Martínez Merchán family is a powerful publisher in Guayaquil. The family, according to some informants, holds political connections with Partido Social Cristiano, the ruler of the city for decades.

⁴⁶ Ecuavisa has been, consistently, one of the most watched televisions in Ecuador. According to Christian Luzuriaga, manager of Kantar Ibope, the company that supervise audience ratings in the country, Ecuavisa and TC Television controlled 70% of the audience share at the time Correa started to rule, in 2007. Kantar Ibope data, only available since 2016, place Ecuavisa's shows in the first positions in audience rankings in Ecuador. See more at <https://www.centrotv.org/es/ratings/ratings-ecuador.html>

⁴⁷ Espinosa de los Monteros holds a Guinness World Record for "Longest career as Television News broadcaster" and started his career as a news host in 1967, the year the station was established. He was still active in 2020.

⁴⁸ During my first interviews in the country, trying to know and to understand Ecuadorean journalism, I asked some of my informants for specific iconic figures that were praised by a majority of the professional community; I was thinking on figures of the likes of Iñaki Gabilondo in Spain or Walter Cronkite in the United States. Some of my interviewees laughed at these comparisons, but Juan Carlos Calderón, an investigative journalist extremely critical with Correa, mentioned Espinosa, together with other names.

something important, reflecting a big national event, and that this production was intended to have (and probably had) a deep impact on public opinion.

‘La batalla de abril’ is a special show with a duration of 52 minutes, conducted by Espinosa de los Monteros, that tries to explain “with facts”, as he introduces, what happened in Ecuador in April 2005. However, the documentary seems to do more than that. The sensationalist resources and effects, the order of appearance of the events covered, and the iteration of a number of basic ideas make of this documentary a fascinating text. This has nothing to do with the overall quality of the documentary –which cannot be compared in terms of production or cinematography with documentaries made in more fluent countries– but mostly with the manner in which this text combines the sensationalist format of American police and crime shows with more local values grounded on the political and social context of the time. The documentary is divided into 5 sections, each counting roughly ten minutes and maintains a constant narrative perspective of covering utterly important, urgent and dangerous events, making emphasis on anything related to guns, quarrels, broken mirrors or burned buildings. The documentary is so devoted to that ‘crime and police’ framing that very often some interviews with witnesses or important protagonists of the events seem out of context, as if the format of the production couldn’t fit the spirit of what happened. In any case, this sensationalist vein does not match the usual narrative, format or edition of a ‘normal’ or above average political documentary. Despite its title, which probably was adopted on purpose, ‘La batalla de abril’ is hard to compare with classic political films such as *La batalla de Chile*, the superb political documentary about Salvador Allende’s deposition in 1973 directed by Patricio Guzman, or *The Battle of Algiers*, Gillo

Pontecorvo's masterpiece released in 1966. The Ecuadorean documentary is mainly a text that plays with popular/commercial television common rules, and, at the same time, discusses about politics, conveying a peculiar confusion between genres and framings.

The story begins with Espinosa de los Monteros introducing one of the places where citizens' indignation reached the highest peak, the so-called 'Ministry of Social Welfare' in downtown Quito. While Espinosa is talking, the audience can see the rubble of glass, bricks and metal of what was left of the former government building, after a crowd of enraged individuals invaded the space, defended by a group of Gutierrez's followers. Another reporter, dressed up in suit and tie like Espinosa, is the first to utter the word, 'the people', in the first minute of the documentary's footage time. "The ex-subsecretary Bolivar Gonzalez made of this ministry the regime's stronghold, and the people wanted to punish him for his actions in Lucio Gutiérrez's government", says the reporter. Next, several witnesses narrate the episode from different perspectives (anti-government assaulters, pro-Gutiérrez defenders, public servants working in the building, etc.). As mentioned above, the sensationalist effects engulf the individuals' declarations with a stream of images of turmoil and fighting. Some testimonies are even shifted to black and white pictures as if their words were the key to some sort of intricate crime.

The next block goes over the events that occurred at Ciespal headquarters in Quito. Here, the audience sees Espinosa in front of Ciespal's main building summarizing the events. Almost immediately Espinosa introduces again one of the main topics of the text, 'the people', with a dignified and grave tone. The host starts by saying that at Ciespal "Palacio took office, but here the people revealed that his discontent was not only against Gutiérrez,

but also against the whole political class”. Next, the camera takes a close-up of Espinosa’s face who declares staring straight to the audience: “To the people who took the name of *forajido* with pride, the congress is only a trade-off center favoring the big groups of power, and because of that, here there was a settling of accounts against the members of the congress who had to face the popular unrest”. After those words, the documentary moves on to interview ordinary people, political representatives, the Ciespal director and police officials present at the time of the events. The general tone is the same as in the previous block; danger, beatings and clashes are stressed among the different versions of what happened.

The following segment discusses Gutiérrez’s attempt to flee the country by plane and the actions taken by a number of ordinary citizens invading Quito’s old airport runways and blocking the ex-president’s flight to take off. Espinosa, this time talking from the airport, recalls before the audience other flights or former Ecuadorean presidents evading their responsibilities: “Another breakout? No! The people want accountability, and here there is the main lesson for politicians”. After those statements, some witnesses detail their role and experiences during the events. Most of the views, embedded in the inevitable sensationalist atmosphere, confirm Espinosa’s editorial line: an almost heroic “peoples’ action” could stop Gutiérrez’s departure.

In the next section, probably the most political of all different parts of the text, the documentary explains the different paths taken by the main political actors (the president, the parliament, political parties, etc.) before and during the crisis. The sensationalist tone remains. This is evidenced, for instance, in the detailed account of personal and family affairs surrounding Gutiérrez’s stay (as asylum seeker) at the Brazilian embassy in Quito. Images

of Gutiérrez's bedroom are provided, alongside the Brazilian ambassador's views on the deposed president's daughter emotional situation; videos of the girl in the school and dancing with her father are shown with dramatic music in the background. Finally, Gutiérrez's escape from the embassy is recreated as if the ex-president was some sort of criminal gang leader with alleged images of Gutierrez leaving the embassy by car, disguised as a police officer.

Finally, the last block is centered on Quito's demonstrations in April, stressing, of course, the most dangerous moments, supported by impactful sequences, such as the rescue of a group of children trapped in some building in old town Quito in the middle of the fray between protesters and the police. Images of the body of the Chilean-Ecuadorean photographer deceased during the protests of April 19 are broadcasted, occupying a central part of the narration, and adding this time a *Nota Roja's* touch, reflecting that Mexican yellow journalism, defined by its focus on stories involving physical violence conveyed by uncensored pictures or videos of victims and aggressors. Before and after these clips and images are broadcasted, Espinosa continues the narration from downtown Quito, in front of the presidential palace, explaining to the audience historical references of popular uprisings in the country. Next, more footage is offered with Quito's citizens shouting "*Si se pudo!* Yes, we could!" celebrating Gutierrez's fall. By the end of the final segment, the camera makes a final close-up on Espinosa's face, who states: "The battle of April is a milestone in the strengthening of Ecuadorean democracy. The people spoke, took action and decided; the future won't be written without (the people). And the elites must understand this".

'La batalla de abril' is not the only documentary released about the Forajidos revolt, but it is the only text available that was produced and broadcasted at the time of the

demonstrations, turning itself into a sort of primary source of those historical events. Other films were produced in Ecuador in 2015 though, as commemorations ten years after the revolt. One of those documentaries was produced by the same Ecuavisa, for the popular show ‘Vision 360’; another one was aired by the public newspaper *El Telegrafo* in the same year. The first one is mostly a classic 45 minute news documentary based on interviews with some of the main protagonists of the events; there are some sensationalists ‘tics’ (for instance, the anchor woman introducing the show talking about the Forajidos’s “hidden truths”) but a more neutral and sober tone remains; the production is much better (cinematography, music, effects, etc.) and references to ‘the people’ are almost absent. The second production is quite different. In his documentary, *El Telégrafo*, state-owned and very close to Correa’s political stances, does include clear references to the people and the format is far from Ecuavisa’s layout. This ‘populist’ text seems to work as a solemn political film without much elaborated content (it is all based on pictures, background sounds and manifestos) which introduces the 2005 events in black and white, taking much of its inspiration from political films and documentaries of the 60s and 70s. It seems pretty clear that it treats the 2005 protests as a foundational moment, a myth for the creation of the so-called ‘Citizen’s Revolution’. *El Telegrafo* didn’t exist in 2005 (like any other public or state-owned media) but we can see perfectly the change in Ecuavisa’s production. From a clear populist, sensationalist or even muckraker text, the private television moved to a centered, mainstream, weekly documentary production.

Going back to the main thesis, after examining those three situations –citizens’ journalism at Radio La Luna, meaningful populist content at legacy newspapers, and

sensationalist populism in a mainstream television broadcasting—, consistent evidence suggests that a populist *zeitgeist* in Ecuador was widely and deeply present throughout the media landscape immediately before the 2006 election. Or, in other words, a sort of ‘full media populism’ cut across the media, reflecting a populist magma ready to erupt in the Ecuadorean society. Of course, the existence of previous populist leaders, such as Abadala Bucaram and Lucio Gutiérrez, anticipated the presence of those populist ideas, but in 2005 the ‘media condition’ or a mediatization process around populism became critically important in a society almost completely alienated from their liberal (and dysfunctional) institutions.

Anyhow, this world of media, social, individual, or cultural dispositions and institutional turmoil would have a political expression in the short term. First, Alfredo Palacio’s interim government would replace Gutiérrez’s administration. Palacio would try to convene a constituent assembly or to call for a constitutional reform, but the lack of parliamentary support would block his attempts to face the political and institutional crisis from which his own government was the most immediate legacy. Eventually, a long and fascinating electoral campaign, which would end in the October-November 2006 ballot boxes, decided the fate of the country. This chapter claims that the political actor that could make the best offer within that ‘full media populist’ context would be the next Ecuadorean president.

3.- The most populist campaign

As advanced above, emerging from dramatic and stressful conditions, Alfredo Palacio's interim government was weak from day one. Let's recall its proclamation at Ciespal's headquarters, amidst riots spurred by a well spread sentiment against politics and the Ecuadorean political class. Conscious of the complex challenge and the deep institutional crisis, Palacio formed a diverse cabinet, mostly center left-oriented, and aimed to convene a constituent process, or at least a sharp reform of the 1998 Constitution to respond to the popular unrest. Rafael Correa was part of the first cabinet filling the strategic position of Minister of Economy, although the former professor would leave office after three months of duty. Non reaching a compromise about how to restructure Ecuador's foreign debt or on the benefits of signing a trade agreement with the United States, Correa and Palacio broke relations, probably disagreeing about the depth and the path to transform the country's institutions.

Palacio's administration, on the other hand, was supported by a fragile and contradictory coalition made by center left Izquierda Democratica (without a powerful representation in the parliament), right wing Partido Social Cristiano (more represented than the former but at odds with Palacio's liberal government) and the indigenous Pachakutik (also without a strong representation) besides a number of independent politicians. Representatives from populist parties created by Bucaram or Gutiérrez obviously refused to cooperate with the government that had ousted their leaders, although at some point they would try to reach some agreements with Palacio's executive. The final picture would be one of a stagnated party system and a weak administration that didn't respond to 2005 revolts. The electoral path to the Ecuadorean presidency in 2006 was wide open and full of

incognita, confirming the traditionally volatile and fragmented political system in the Andean nation (Mainwaring, 2006).

This is the context in which a group of leftists created the political organization Patria Altiva i Soberana (PAIS), a “citizen movement” which was born “with a Forajido soul”, endorsing the cry of “thrown them all out!” (Larrea, 2009: 27). The political group, which was presented publicly by January 2006, although designed and formed since September 2005 (Larrea, 31), was basically formed by scholars and leftist politicians⁴⁹ that didn’t feel represented by the existing Ecuadorean left formed by Izquierda Democratica, Pachakutik and other smaller organizations. That group of personalities and small entities, allied with other leftist and progressive groups, would form Alianza Pais, the new ‘movement’ that would support Rafael Correa’s peculiar presidential candidacy.

3.1.- Citizens and ‘la patria’ against ‘partidocracia’

To start, Correa’s candidacy made a direct and full rejection of the whole party system without presenting any single representative for Congress and advocating blank vote for the legislative component of the 2006 elections⁵⁰. Once elected president, Correa

⁴⁹ Composed back then by personalities such as Alberto Acosta (one of the most known Ecuadorean economists, later turned into one of Correa’s fiercest enemies), Ricardo Patiño (several times occupying key departments in Correa’s administration, such as Defense, Foreign Affairs or Economy), Fander Falconí (an economist and environmental expert, later at odds with Correa’s oil extraction agenda) or Gustavo Larrea (a political operator, also distanced from Correa from 2009 onwards).

⁵⁰ The Ecuadorean electoral presidential system (which has changed several times since the democratization of the country in the 80s, especially in the type of circumscription and proportional method) consists, basically, in the direct suffrage of the presidential ticket (president and vice-president) in two rounds if necessary, and the proportional vote from opened lists of candidates as national representatives in the parliament. The presidential candidate normally is represented within a list that also incorporates the legislative candidates. A full vote for a political organization would be to elect the whole list (classified by numbers) for the presidency and for the parliament. In the 2006 elections, Correa’s Alianza Pais appeared as ‘lista 35’ with a presidential ticket but without any legislative representatives. About method and formal aspects of the Ecuadorean electoral system, see more at Ortiz (2012), or Freidemberg and Pachano (2017).

promised, the new government would call to convene a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. So, Correa's party was not, at least during the first moments, a very consistent and solidified political organization; actually, Alianza Pais would be linked to Correa's figure to the very beginning. This facet would mark Correa's first campaign and probably the future of the party, inevitably associated to Correa's name and a governmental condition or *oficialismo*.

But in the first months of 2006, Alianza Pais tried to expand from an initial 'elite state', promoting local associations ('family committees') throughout the country to start discussing the movement's ideas and short-term goals. At the same time, the political movement began to advocate the ideal of a 'citizens revolution' articulated by 'real change' in a number of fields, from the economy (and here the 'big fish' would be restructuring foreign debt) to the education, infrastructure, etc. Nothing is said in the foundational moments of media policy or media reform. A persistent theme though, already in the beginnings of the movement, was the ideal of 'regaining homeland' or to bring the homeland back to the citizens, rejecting at the same time some of the legacies of the Latin American left⁵¹, especially those regarding authoritarian hierarchies and the lack of a more transversal view of society. In summary, the weight of 'la patria' in Alianza Pais' project and the new understanding of what the left should be, would be core elements of the political option, articulated in campaign messages from the very beginning, trying to introduce a transversal movement to the Ecuadorean people. Correa presented himself as a "Christian socialist but

⁵¹ "The movement's bid was to be a creative and unified left, non-authoritarian, neither dogmatic nor sectarian. Rejecting the repetitive and stereotypical language to build the project of a country with all citizenship in which humor, joy, audacity, tenderness and irreverence may be included to transform all dimensions of social life" (Larrea, 33).

not a Marxist”⁵², clarifying his distance from the traditional left, although he showed sympathies for the new ‘Socialism for the Twentieth Century’ projected by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Nestor Kirchner in Argentina. He also found inspiration in the recently elected Bolivian leader, Evo Morales, and Brazil’s president, Luiz Inazio da Silva. Additionally, the person chosen to complete Correa’s ticket, Lenin Moreno, who came out as a second option after negotiations with Pachakutik failed (Lucas, 2007: 97-99), was a moderate leftist who overcame an almost fatal incident with thieves losing both legs’ mobility. Moreno added even more intersections to Correa’s candidacy: a champion for people with disabilities and entrepreneur original from the traditionally underrepresented region of Oriente completed the ‘cross-sectional’ political project. Finally, Alianza Pais would be also one of the few political movements in Ecuador with a comprehensive distribution throughout the country; that is to say, Correa’s movement would be one of the few fully ‘national’ political organizations, with huge supports from any corner of the nation: Quito, Guayaquil, the Sierra, the Coast and the Amazonia. This ‘nationalizing’ goal, explicitly exhibited in the ‘bring the homeland back’ motto, was, however, not fully achieved in the 2006 elections where most of the votes originated in Quito and the Sierra region; the ‘pan-national’ support would be accomplished a few years after, with Correa in power⁵³.

⁵² A repeated phrase, during the 2006 Campaign and afterwards. See more at <https://www.reuters.com/article/latinoamerica-ecuador-referendo-correa-idLTASIE48P1MJ20080926>

⁵³ It was in the 2013 elections when that idea of a full national party, supported equally by every region, would be eventually confirmed. However, according to some empirical studies (Polga-Hecimovich, 2014; Ortiz & Burbano de Lara, 2017) the national performance of the party would be associated to the personalization of the party’s leadership; or, in other words, correlated with Correa’s authority as a national leader. This had never happened in the most important parties since the first democratic elections in 1979. Partido Social Cristiano had been, always, the party from the coast and Guayaquil, and Izquierda Democrática, a platform notably supported by the Sierra region. This dimension, obviously, would make the duality Correa-AP a very difficult party to beat in any national elections.

In sum, transversality and national scope, a new understanding of progressive or leftist values, sympathy to the emerging Latin American Pink Tide, a clear but bold political project and a plain to see enemy (Ecuador's political class and the traditional oligarchy) constituted Alianza País' complete formula. Together with the full media populist context, all factors were ready there at the beginning of the 2006 campaign for a populist option to thrive. Moreover, in this case, it would be a professional and pervasive, or 'technocratic' (De La Torre, 2013), populism, where the leader and many of his advisers qualified as experts in their specific areas, a very meaningful difference compared to previous populist experiences. This expertise dimension would appear many times during the campaign along with Correa's outsider's facet, as an avenger prepared to punish the 'evil' political class that had destroyed the country allied with the other big enemy, the banks and financial institutions, domestic and international. The motto '¡Dale Correa!' (roughly translated as 'hit them with your belt') was widely utilized. In conclusion, AP's populist script was pretty consistent: there was the 'good people' (under the form of the citizenship and homeland) betrayed by an 'enemy' (the political and financial elites) that could be represented and defended by a qualified outsider (an economist with expert credentials, and honest former Economy minister), who at the same time introduced himself vaguely, as a Christian socialist, advocating for distribution of wealth and totally opposed to abortion rights or same sex marriage. In any case, the Revolución Ciudadana (RC) and Rafael Correa (RC)⁵⁴ wouldn't introduce themselves either

⁵⁴ Revolución Ciudadana and Rafael Correa use the same acronyms. This a precision I wasn't aware of until Alberto Acosta, one of the pioneers of that concept, made that remark during our conversation in the summer of 2018.

as the left nor the right, but as the representatives of a humiliated nation eager to fight against their enemies.

3.2.- The media and candidate Correa

The 2006 electoral process, which was seen back then as one of the most important elections in Ecuador's recent history, gathered many political parties and diverse platforms; in total 13 candidates ran for president⁵⁵. As a matter of fact, the political process incorporated several innovations in campaigning, at least in the country and in the region, and media in its different formats and platforms played a crucial role. Alianza Pais and Correa were the political actors who best analyzed those conditions and, in the end, interpreted the 'full media populist' context of the election. Correa and his Citizen Revolution not only developed creative campaign messages, mottos, logos and media productions, but had a productive and mostly positive relationship with all media, mainstream and alternative, as possibly had never happened in Ecuadorean history.

Alianza Pais' political project was supported by mainstream and alternative media in an unprecedented way. Unprecedented because the previous populist leaders (Bucaram and Gutiérrez) did not enjoy the same support from the media⁵⁶, while Correa's Alianza Pais was promoted, and its campaign mottos echoed by a diverse variety of media. Radio La Luna

⁵⁵ They were Jaime Damerval (Concentraci3n Fuerzas Populares), Rafael Correa (Alianza Pais), Gilmar Guti3rrez (Partido Sociedad Patri3tica), Marcelo Larrea (Tercera Republica), Luis Macas (Pachakutik), Alvaro Noboa (Partido Renovaci3n Institucional), Marco Proa3o (Movimiento Republicano Democr3tico), Cinthya Viteri (Partido Social Cristiano), Leon Roldos (Izquierda Democratica), Fernando Rosero (Partido Roldosista), Carlos Sagnay (INA), Lenin Torres (Movimiento Revolucionario Patri3tico Popular) and Luis Villac3s (Movimiento Popular Democr3tico).

⁵⁶ In the case of Bucaram, Cordova (2003) even claims a total rejection from mainstream media in the country.

endorsed the leader and the movement that mirrored some of Forajidos' revindications of the preceding year. Many other private or community radios followed La Luna's example. Additionally, elite press like *El Universo* or *El Comercio* didn't support openly Correa and Moreno ticket, but their coverage of the political outsider was way more positive compared to other electoral contenders. Content analysis of the most supported and rejected political actors by both newspapers in 2006 confirms that the Ecuadorean leader was the single candidate that got the most positive coverage by both media, among some erratic support provided to several politicians, most of them from conservative parties.

Table 1.3: Political Parallelism in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*

	2005	2006
N/A	158	161
Critical on the government	11	1
Critical on Correa	0	0
Critical of politician	3	2
Supporting government	7	4
Supporting Correa	0	6
Supporting politician	8	6
Other	5	12
Total	192	192

In addition to that reception, television covered Correa's campaign and Correa's figure in a mostly positive way. Especially during the election runoff, Correa enjoyed even more level of positive coverage than his rival, Alvaro Noboa. As De la Torre and Conaghan (2009) explain in an article about the 2006 elections in Ecuador:

Overall, Correa came out the winner in the battle for television coverage. In the first round, Correa led as the candidate who received the most television coverage time and edged out Noboa for the most “sound bites” allotted to any candidate. Correa received relatively little negative coverage in the first round; negative coverage accounted for 9% of Correa’s overall television coverage versus 22% for Noboa (Participación Ciudadana 2006b). In the second round, Correa maintained his advantage over Noboa, receiving positive television coverage that was more than double that of Noboa and a little less than half of the negative coverage received by Noboa (Participación Ciudadana 2006c). Correa’s success in garnering better coverage from influential journalists and pundits was evident when he secured endorsements from two of the most watched figures on television. Freddy Ehlers. . . popular host of the highly rated Sunday evening program *La Televisión*, openly embraced Correa on his show. Carlos Vera, the journalist–host of a top morning news show and Sunday talk show *Cero Tolerancia*, also weighed in on Correa’s behalf with withering attacks on Noboa.” (343)

De la Torre and Conaghan are pristine clear: Correa had a huge and widely positive coverage in the 2006 elections and this factor may be one of the best predictors of Correa’s electoral victory. However, almost any data from that quote depend on reports from Participación Ciudadana⁵⁷, a non-governmental organization based in Quito that does not provide those analyses about media coverage anymore. In another report from that time, published at *Chasqui* magazine in March 2007, Osvaldo León, a local journalist, argues about a tighter race between Correa and Noboa in terms of television coverage in the runoff, and notices negative coverage towards Correa by Grupo Isaias media group, which in 2006 was one of the most influential in the country. León suggests that Correa won even against mainstream media and thanks to new digital media and alternative spaces articulated around the Forajido revolt which ran against mainstream media.

⁵⁷ More info at <https://www.participacionciudadana.org/>.

Yet, notwithstanding Leon's contradictory report, most of the subjects interviewed for this study confirmed⁵⁸ a substantial support from the media. Many of the informants actually used the case of the fertile relationship between Correa and Carlos Vera, the journalist host of many popular shows in Ecuavisa⁵⁹, to explain in detail how Correa and private media enjoyed a "honeymoon" before the former professor was elected president. It is also interesting to note that Correa was a controversial and attractive candidate ("the young handsome economist, former boy Scout", as one famous Ecuadorean journalist put it) who could call one of his adversaries "pancreatic cancer" and at the same time was able to explain how unfair the structure and management of foreign debt was. Recapitulating, Correa was loved or at least followed by the audience; he was a good entertainer, and commercial, community or alternative media wanted him in their shows to increase their ratings and influence on the public opinion. The few journalists and policy actors active in the country back then who remembered a negative or neutral relationship between Correa and the media put the "good relations with Ecuavisa" into perspective, stressing the private broadcaster's owner bad dealings with Alvaro Noboa.

Perhaps the most accurate depiction of Correa's relations with media, especially mainstream, may be one of a nonaggression by several news companies and open support

⁵⁸ Basically, all subjects interviewed acknowledged media interest in Correa's figure when the Economics professor emerged, although a few of them (notably those closer to Correa's government stances, such as Carlos Ochoa, Fernando Alvarado or Orlando Perez) rejected a plain support and pointed out mostly to Correa's attractive features for commercial television to increase audience ratings and media's influence.

⁵⁹ "Chávez comes to power in Venezuela using all the existing media structure; he was, certainly, a well-regarded candidate. Here Correa takes that to the next level. Correa is not only a well-accepted but also well supported by media, and especially by Ecuavisa, in that moment symbolic for the media and (he was supported) in particular by the journalist of reference in the country back then who is Carlos Vera. Vera was a guy that opened the microphone and that was the weeks' topic, and Carlos Vera opened the microphone to Rafael Correa" (Andersson Boscan, journalist at *Expreso* and *La Posta*).

by a number of shows and journalists. Contingencies such as the type of opponent for the runoff, Alvaro Noboa, a billionaire who ran a plainly clientelist and paternalistic campaign, must have added more audience (and votes) to Correa and his platform. In any case, Rafael Correa's leadership and the specific quality of his electoral campaign resonated with the country's critical situation as it was introduced above through the assessment of opinion polls and the existence of a full media populism entrenched in the media system. Borrowing Michael Schudson's use of the concept of 'resonance' to analyze the way cultural objects are "relevant to the life of the audience" (Schudson, 1989: 167-170) constituting very often the essence of "hits" and success for mass media industries, we might say that Correa and his campaign presented a relevant and resonant cultural object that met the Ecuadoreans anger and hopes cemented through a never-ending institutional crisis.

3.3.- The populist campaign

As the process was being unfolded, it had to be difficult for any of the other candidates to match Correa campaign's level in terms of expertise and resources. Only billionaire Noboa could meet and outspend Correa's platform electoral expenditure⁶⁰, but little more than that. Alianza Pais' campaign was much better designed to resonate with the existing socio-political context, however, Correa's campaign was not a monolithic plan: it evolved from the start and adapted to a more binary contest, especially in the runoff, incorporating more innovations to the political competition. Alianza Pais' campaign actually

⁶⁰ Versions and data about electoral expenditure in the 2006 elections are not clear. De la Torre and Conaghan (2009) repeat very similar figures for Correa and Noboa in the first and second round (near to 2 million dollars and 1.3 million, respectively) whereas Leon (2007) points out a total spending of 2.5 million by Correa, and around 6.9 million by Noboa.

shifted electoral adviser teams⁶¹ during the electoral process. The first was headed by the American political consultant Ralph Murphine and the Mexican expert Carlos Mandujano; some months after, due to bad poll figures, Correa's old-time friend from Guayaquil, Vinicio Alvarado, was incorporated; Mandujano and Murphine were sidelined⁶². From then on, especially after the summer of 2006⁶³, Alvarado would be the director and the campaign would focus on media sharply, especially television. The whole process began with some good coverage from alternative and mainstream media, but it was basically the supplement of a local, community-based, on the road campaign, which pushed Correa to travel throughout the country. The electoral platform placed a lot of effort on establishing contact with local radios and communities, while Correa appeared in the domestic press as a transversal and progressive Catholic. For instance, in one of his first press coverages as a candidate, on March 25, 2006, Correa and his team went to visit Pope Benedict XVI in Rome; a brief press release in *El Comercio* reads: "Pre-candidate Rafael Correa's PR office is one of the most dynamic ever. They recently sent some curious pictures of Correa watching the Pope during the so-called 'hand-kissing' ceremony. There was such enthusiasm that they posted three pictures on the candidacy's webpage. Correa's mystique is evident."

Creative, unconventional and controversial, the process directed by Alvarado after the summer launched a number of initiatives, all of them focused on media, traditional or new. Correa's electoral race was one of the first hybrid campaigns in the region and certainly

⁶¹ According to Larrea (2009), and confirmed with more detail by Jose Alonso, part of Correa's PR team in 2006 (interview August 2018).

⁶² Jose Alonso's interview.

⁶³ The new campaign methods (more creative and designed for television) were introduced to the public in August 2006. See more at <https://www.eluniverso.com/2006/08/27/0001/8/CA7DB234902F4A67A10EB9CFCB18DFC6.html>

a pioneer in Ecuador (De la Torre & Conaghan, 2009; Rivera Costales, 2014), presenting a website (rafaelcorrea.com) where the youngest and most connected followers could see the latest videos, photographs or events starring Correa. In a country with less of 7% of the population with Internet access in 2006, according to World Bank data, that meant probably little in terms of numbers, but much more regarding the social and cultural profile of those with Internet access, presumably individuals with better education and higher income levels, setting a trend of an electric, modern, and futuristic candidate. Additionally, that capacity suggests a significant support of many voters among the Ecuadorean community abroad. The rest of the candidates would try to emulate Correa's connectivity without much success. Additionally, Correa's team's average age (incorporating many young, educated people, including Correa himself, 43 back then) was quickly reflected in the music and logos designed for the electoral campaign. The main mottos already mentioned ("Dale Correa" or "Volver a tener Patria") were integrated into catchy tunes, using popular salsa genres as a sort of campaign soundtrack, or rock music and hip hop in other clips targeting young and urban audiences. The optimistic salsa titled 'Sueños' became almost the official campaign song, repeated in every clip, production, event or meeting; principal topics of the 1 minute 46 seconds track are 'la patria', 'change', 'Correa president', 'oil owned by everybody', 'no more hunger' or 'the people governing'.

But it was in its videos or media productions where Correa's campaign was truly unusual or even maverick. That campaign for instance was one of the first in the world to use Star Wars icons to animate election themes and stories. In a video of 46 seconds designed to be broadcasted on television, the Imperial forces are incarnated by the PUM (the

Partidocracia Unida Moribunda, the United Dying Party-crazy), represented by the allegedly corrupt and decadent politicians from almost any party. Mocking images of several politicians appear with the famous Imperial March in the background; they accuse Correa of being communist, fascist, backed by the Cuban government, or they just utter epithets against him. The video finishes with a strong ‘enough is enough!’ cry emerging on a bright green (Alianza Pais’ distinctive color) accompanied by the usual campaign melody; Correa’s images close the video as a promise to terminate the political class’ charades.

To illuminate fully the key media-production dimension in Correa’s campaign, it is worth mentioning at least two more videos which impacted Ecuadorean audiences and are widely recalled as hits of the electoral process. With a playing time of 46 and 30 seconds, respectively, these clips designed for television functioned as sophisticated metaphors of Ecuador’s main problem (and big enemy) according to Correa’s platform: the political class. The first of them shows a scene drawn from a wildlife documentary, with a gazelle racing in the middle of the African savannah; the animal is persecuted and finally caught by a leopard, meanwhile, a voice over associates the image of the poor gazelle with the Ecuadorean citizenship and the evil leopard with the political class; the production finishes with a close-up image of Correa stating that “enough is enough” and asking the people to “go together” to a “constituent assembly” while the catchy salsa tune sounds in the background. The second video displays an individual dressed up in suit and tie, waiting for an elevator with the name ‘National Congress’ visible on the door. Nino Rota’s *Amarcord* theme plays in the background; once the elevator opens its doors, we see a clown and a shabby-fake superhero. The individual (allegedly a member of the parliament) enters the

elevator; next the bright green occupies the screen with the simple phrase, “Enough is enough!” and finally “Dale Correa, a la constituyente” (Hit them with the belt/Correa, towards the constituent assembly). No other music is played.

None of the other candidates, including the other main contender, Alvaro Noboa, matched that level of production and sophistication. Correa’s could be seen as a basic contemporary populist campaign, probably a pioneer, fulfilling core requirements for a populist communication as it is normally stated by the literature⁶⁴, and this was very difficult to challenge by less professionalized campaigns, based on more traditional and local methods of electoral advertising. For instance, Cynthia Viteri, from PSC, Leon Roldós, from Izquierda Democrática, or even Alvaro Noboa with his party Prian, didn’t provide populism’s distinctive features of dividing the political world into an ‘us versus them’ scheme. The only other candidate that used a populist campaign in the 2006 elections was the one supported by Bucaram’s party, Partido Roldosista, a political platform with an obvious populist past, although the enemy in this case was a more abstract oligarchy, a category as we have seen in the other sections, less resonant throughout the media landscape. On the other hand, the people as the subject of the campaign only appeared tangentially in most of electoral advertising, except Correa’s platform. In its campaign ‘the people’, portrayed as the ‘homeland’ and the ‘citizenship’, was the main character along with Correa himself. In addition to that, Alianza Pais’ campaign was more multidimensional; it used the basic populist frame to target many different audiences and contexts; from the Sierra to the

⁶⁴ The definition of a full populist communication would be revisited in the following chapters, but let’s advance its key components according to Aalberg et al (2017): The appeal to the people, anti-elitism and exclusion of out-groups. Correa’s populism in 2006 satisfies at least the two first units of that definition, constituting what these authors call ‘anti-elitist populism’.

Coast, from urban to rural areas, from the young skeptical to the traditional Catholic. In doing so, it achieved a level of personalization that was absent or difficult to find in the other candidates. Looking at the other contender's election advertising⁶⁵, there is little of specification, personalization, or community sensation. They tend to be mere affirmative/supporting materials praising the candidates' features. The only shared aspect among all candidates (Correa here included) was the call for a change or some sort of national renaissance. Alianza Pais' platform, however, was probably the only one providing a route for that change insisting on the constituent assembly.

Noboa, who beat Correa by 4 points in the first round, portrayed himself as a sort of 'chosen one' or the big father who would bring jobs, health and education⁶⁶ to all Ecuadoreans. He constantly appealed to God and Christian beliefs to define himself as 'Almighty God's' representative. Once Correa turned out to be his main contender in the runoff, Noboa shifted to a negative campaign associating Correa to Cuba and Venezuela and warning about the coming of a communist atheist dictatorship. Correa, in turn, focused on Noboa's billionaire background depicting the businessman as an exploiter, repeating that Ecuadorean dignity was above Noboa's checkbook. Noboa avoided a direct discussion with Correa, an agile orator, and a televised debate between both candidates was never broadcasted. Weeks before the runoff, a famous show produced by Ecuavisa, presented the

⁶⁵ All these electoral materials were analyzed online when available on Youtube. Some consultations were made to an interesting dissertation defended in a local university (Piñeiros, 2018) which provides all 2006's electoral propaganda with brief assessments for each television add.

⁶⁶ Actually, Noboa's events or campaign meetings offered free doctor's consultations to the masses and promised government jobs or subsidies to those willing to support his candidacy (De la Torre & Conaghan, 2009).

final contenders' profiles, blatantly supporting Correa or, from another point of view, buying Correa's depiction of Noboa as an evil, mean, and tacky billionaire.

Correa won the runoff with 56.67% of the vote, while Noboa was supported by 43.33% of ballots. The former professor and minister of Economy defeated the Guayaquil's banana mogul, but the final picture didn't exhibit a totally unified country. Noboa gathered most of the votes from the coast, whereas Correa gained very high support from Quito, the Sierra and the sparsely populated Oriente. But Alianza Pais, the novel political organization with a candidate that a couple of years before was unknown to most of Ecuadoreans, won the election. It was the beginning of a complex political process that included the call to convene a constituent assembly to remake the country's institutional setting. Correa's party, by the way, would transform itself into a more national force, winning widely in all regions, without the usual territorially fragmented base of the Ecuadorean political parties. But remarkably, and beyond the specifics of the geographic and socio-demographic factors, the context of a full media populism and Correa's solid media rendition and understanding of those conditions, played a crucial role in the political earthquake that would change the face of Ecuador's politics. The country and especially Quito were in 2005 and 2006 turned into the stage of a media struggle and transformation, and one political actor was the ableist to identify and to capture a context that situated media at the core of the political process. Once in power that actor would try to maintain the control of that particular mediatization of politics as we will examine in the following chapters.

4.- Discussion: Mediatization of politics and populism in the Ecuadorean mirror

In this chapter we have examined the rise of Rafael Correa as a populist actor in the turbulent Ecuadorean context of 2005 and 2006. This was a process in which a novel politician, a veritable outsider, would adapt smartly to a full populist context, clearly identifiable by a deep institutional crisis and by the way media conveyed populism in different directions during and after the Forajidos Revolt of April 2005. In fact, and more precisely, this chapter argues that a sort of multilayered full media populism ran across the public sphere in the years prior to Correa's election as president, situating media at the core of the political process. Examining the role played by Radio La Luna during the uprising, exploring the content analysis from the influential (and elite) news media and observing mainstream commercial television is easy to conclude that the spread and strengthening of populist ideas depended heavily on the media environment. At some point, the situation just needed the emergence of some political actor able to represent those ideas (such as the dialectic between the people and the political class) and to exploit them electorally.

Rafael Correa and the novel party created around him (a coalition of leftist personalities and small progressive parties), offered that representation. And they did it by producing and reproducing videos, songs, messages, mottos, events that resonated with the Ecuadorean context in the most outstanding way; at least when comparing Correa's campaign ads and mottos to the other candidates' political propaganda. The main distinction, or in Laclausian terms, AP's principal "political frontier" was drawn between a decent and honorable people and the corrupt and mediocre 'political class'. The electoral program was quite specific with plans to convene a constituent assembly to write a new Constitution.

Furthermore, Correa's platform was not only a matter of words, promises and political gestures, it was a matter of novel campaigning tactics and techniques which reflected the populist environment. Media, as we have seen throughout this chapter, was always at the center. Correa's media savvy candidacy was supported by mainstream and alternative media. But this positive atmosphere exogenous so to speak to the political actor did not constitute the full picture: Correa's project also acted as a mighty and creative media platform, providing catchy songs, original videos, creative events, and controversial mottos reflecting the plain populist *zeitgeist* on any format or type of media, from new digital outlets to commercial television shows and community or alternative radios.

In summary, media spurred populism and critically supported the rise of Correa as the next Ecuadorean president in 2006. In some way, at this point, the Ecuadorean case confirms claims of a media logic helping to create the conditions for the emergence of populist actors. Many authors, from Mazzoleni (2008, 2014) relying on European cases, to Samet (2019, pp. 14-17) around the Venezuelan case, besides a body of research especially developed in Europe (de Vreese et al, 2018), have addressed this particular correlation: a commercial autonomous media logic seems to excite populism, directly or indirectly. Or even more, within the theoretical frame that suggest that a mediatization of politics has been taking place especially in the Western world in the last decades (Esser & Strömback, 2014), populism would be a consequence of that mediatization. In the Ecuadorean case, that media logic ruling over politics would have created the conditions of Rafael Correa's victory. This equation looks pretty straightforward following the sequence of events analyzed in this

chapter. But there are some gaps that need more explanation before just validating the integration of this case within the bigger picture of an overarching almighty mediatization.

Let's recall that basically the mediatization process, or its internal media logic, are defined by three core dimensions: professionalization, commercialization, and new communications technologies (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014: 3–30). Ecuador's media system, as we advanced before, was certainly highly commercialized and unregulated, but that situation was far from the one experts and scholars assume when dealing with developed countries. Journalistic professionalism was low and news media very often provided support to or colluded with political and economic elites. Furthermore, the scarcity of information about news organizations' audiences, level of circulation, readership or ratings, only monitored by a private company focused on Quito and Guayaquil, marks also a key aspect of opacity in media markets. Actually, Ecuadoreans distrusted widely news media when Correa emerged as a political figure, according to Latinobarometro opinion polls. Another dimension structural for the mediatization of politics thesis lies in a technological development that creates the possibilities for that expansion of media. Ecuador was far from having a basic structure for digital communications when the 2006 election took place, and the national media market was not well integrated with vast percentages of the population without access to many media, especially the printed press, besides a decent Internet connection. It was, in a few words, an underdeveloped country in terms of adoption of communication technologies.

In sum, populism in the Ecuadorean context was not coupled with the type of mediatization process that many scholars assume; however, a populist actor did win the 2006

election and media played an essential role. At this point the Ecuadorean case turns into something that could be categorized as some sort of mediatization of politics *avant la lettre*, addressing perhaps important inconsistencies between theory and evidence. Moreover, media (in our case *Radio La Luna*, *El Comercio*, *El Universo* and Ecuavisa's shows) supported the creation of a populist actor, Rafael Correa and his platform, Alianza Pais, *but the populist actor itself*, Correa, his media experts, his coalition of parties, its activists, *pushed also for its emergence*, in the midst of a sharp political competition, *performing populist communication and even acting as a media platform*. So, in conclusion, it was not just a media logic, arisen from vaguely 'independent' media companies, and expressed on commercial goals of increasing ratings and readership that was the major and only source of populism. It was, mostly, a contextualized media logic, made by media populism and a populist media actor. In other words, while there was working on one hand a kind of *sui generis* mediatization of politics, on the other, an active populist actor was creating a sort of *political mediatization*, integrating its own political goals into new or existing media formats and grammars in a given media system. Thus, media shaped politics but politics, under its populist form, so also influenced media.

Finally, this chapter also discussed a situation which formed a sort of pre-condition, or a 'genetic context', of that particular intersection between media and populism, and it goes back, I believe, to the deep crisis of representation of the system. The opinion polls collected from the late 1990s until 2005-2006 are clear: a *crescendo* of social distrust took over practically all socio-political institutions. Additionally, political activism data from 2002 to 2006 reflected a civil society apparently inert, passive, disconnected from politics.

However, in 2005 the popular unrest was transformed into a massive revolt that eventually helped to depose the elected president, Lucio Gutiérrez.

I believe that the key question here lies in that the rage emerged was directed and re-directed by the media, and later reused by a media savvy populist actor. The Forajidos' revolt was mostly spontaneous, headless, and transversal. But, as it was underscored in this chapter, an alternative medium, Radio La Luna, appeared at the center of the protests, giving voice to a diverse spectrum of indignation and alternative views. At that point, with protests strikingly similar to mobilizations occurred at Argentina in 2001, very few institutions seemed to respond to the Ecuadorean outrage. 'Throw then all out' was the cry, and only one small although quite famous alternative radio was eager to provide a space for those cries beyond the streets, besides SMS shared via cellphones. In other words, *an alternative media institutionalized the protests, the rage, and the route to change*. Most mainstream media downplayed the numbers and intensity of the protests. They were stained by their past before and after the Feriado and basically no one expected that the national mass media were the place to have the discussion the country needed.

And the change came about. Gutiérrez was ousted and a new government replaced the colonel with promises of a constituent process, referenda, and a national re-birth. One month after Palacio came to power, Ecuavisa and his star host were producing a blatantly populist and sensationalist documentary praising the people and warning the elites. Content analysis of *El Comercio* and *El Universo* registered references to the people and its enemy during those years. In other words, mainstream media *reacted* to the finally victorious waves of indignation, posting populist content, but didn't boost them originally. And this goes back

to the question of mediatization and how it may have had a political effect. What was first and more fundamental? Were those conditions and the agency of those protesting? Or were the combination between Radio La Luna and later mainstream media covering, framing, and analyzing the events? There are at least two responses to those questions: either this is not a discussion about mediatization or on how a media logic conditions the way politics is done; or there are factors, dimensions or processes not solidly integrated in a theory of mediatization. If we maintain that media (all media) played an important role in Ecuador's political change, an argument that this study clearly supports, the mediatization process or the components of media logic must be redefined beyond a ripe professionalization, a core commercial logic and the technological development. Simply put, those elements are not enough to understand how media related with politics in the Ecuadorean case. In 2006, a peripheral country showed that its 'media condition', using the classical definition by Altheide and Snow (1979), was present and alive in one important critical juncture, but it also demonstrated its complex interaction with deep institutional crises and with a bold and media savvy populist actor, who started to shape the whole media condition, as we will continuing narrating the in the following pages.

Chapter 2:

“Patria o Prensa Corrupta”: Media war or the struggle over communication control

Victorious Rafael Correa took the reins of a country that had lived a deep political crisis, as shown in the previous chapter, but whose economy was performing quite well. Let's recall that in 2006 the Ecuadorean GDP grew 4.4% and in 2005, the increase had reached 5.2%. Correa, consequently, based his electoral campaign and his plans for government on a combination of political measures, such as the call of a constituent assembly to reform the political system, and a bold policy aiming to redistribute the national wealth, waving the banner of the 'Citizens Revolution' created during the campaign. Media seemed to support these issues during the presidential campaign, at least during the first months of Correa's presidency. Even if Noboa, the other presidential candidate in the runoff, and some political figures from the right have called Correa's political project "communist", "fascist", or "pro-Cuban", mainstream media adopted a gentle line to frame the emerging leader, the economist with good academic credentials who was almost unknown in the country two years earlier. For instance, *El Universo*, the Guayaquil newspaper, usually associated with conservative stances, published on election day (November 26, 2006) an almost elegiac article titled "Rafael Correa: profile of a leftist Christian". In it, the coastal media praised Correa, the scholar, his family life (citing his mother and his wife), the leader's social credentials (who worked with the poor as a young boy scout) and his "secure and

independent image”. For many, the newspaper stated, “Correa incarnated the change that the country requires to leave behind the unequal redistribution of its wealth”. Although the article also cited some accusations from his detractors who called him “arrogant”, the story emphasized his Christian record, even rejecting his adscription to a “Marxist left”. It was an article, after all, consequent with the tone that many media embraced when covering Correa.

On television Correa was welcomed with a more balanced tone. Ecuavisa, one of the most influential private television broadcasters in the country, had supported Correa against Noboa in the runoff, but its sympathy didn’t transform into any sort of *carte blanche* to the new elected president. In Correa’s first interview once elected⁶⁷, Carlos Vera, the popular anchor who had supported him several times, congratulated the president but then declared instantly that he would “militate in democratic support and in full-frontal criticism” to his government. And their conversation wasn’t soft at all; the president contested some of Vera’s economic figures and replied sharply to several questions. Vera even asked Correa if he would return the phone call to the usual “financistas y aduladores”⁶⁸ now that he was elected, reminding him that “the next day after winning the elections, you lose power”. To that, the young leader responded that he didn’t have any contact with such people and that he was forming a “different government, a government of good people; just as you are a good person, here (in this government) there are good people; just as you have clean hands, here there are people with clean hands, and we will not accept these rats who has caused so much harm to our country”. The interview would finish just 30 seconds later with a formal question

⁶⁷ This interview is available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcriMGUFW0Y&t=1s>

⁶⁸ Roughly translated as “financers and flatterers”.

about Correa's first steps to which the leader didn't know exactly what to say: "We were so concentrated on D-day that we didn't think about what to do after winning!".

Some months later, the particular relationship between Correa and Carlos Vera, or the apparently idyllic relationship between the media and the new leader, began to change. It was May 2007, and Correa had a strong argument with Emilio Palacio, the head of *El Universo's* opinion section and Carlos Jijón, news director at Ecuavisa⁶⁹. During his weekly conversation with the press, called *Dialogos con el Presidente*, which would be transformed into the populist show *Enlace Ciudadano* by 2009, Correa, Jijón and Palacio had a bitter discussion about the role of the press during the 1999 crisis. The debate got into such resentful terms that it ended with Palacio's expulsion from the show hosted at the presidential palace; Jijón and other journalists present at the event left in solidarity with Palacio, while most of the press at the show remained, some of them booing Palacio's behavior. Vera condemned Correa's conduct in his evening news show, attacking the president's "professorial attitude" and arrogance; "Okay! So, the president can discredit whoever he wants but when someone raises his voice, that can't be done... he is the president, not his Majesty or the Emperor!", elaborated Vera adding, with a more peaceful tone, that he disagreed with Jijón's and Palacio's approaches, although he couldn't understand a president who insulted journalists.

This event at the presidential palace, echoed in Vera's popular show, was quite present in conversations with some journalists and policy actors discussing about Correa's

⁶⁹ This 'first clash' between Correa and the media is available on YouTube in two separated clips: Video part 1 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GgUpz_lTa4&t=405s) and video part 2 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yANBg7fYIQE&t=19s>)

abrupt change towards the media and vice versa. As shown in the previous chapter, Correa's electoral platform was widely supported by alternative and key mainstream media. However, in some years Correa turned into one of the fiercest enemies of Ecuador's private mainstream media. When asked about this 180 degree turnaround, many of the journalists and media actors interviewed for this study cited Palacio's altercation at the presidential palace as possibly the first time that the defining clash between Correa's government and the media emerged. However, not all those that recalled this event framed it in the same way. For some, Correa was the offender, the arrogant leader who used his power to crush journalists' justified criticism; for others, it was Palacio's inflated aggressiveness and the fault of part of the Ecuadorean media establishment who tried to control Correa's policies, acting more as political actors than as neutral media companies. This discussion, and those positions, ran throughout the more or less detailed explanations offered by the journalists, analysts and policy actors interviewed.

This chapter will be focused on the different explanations and reasons available to understand what caused deteriorated relations between the new government and the established media and how that problematic interaction was reflected in specific dates, events, content and discourses. We will see how, first, this was a process on the go; neither Correa nor the media knew that clash had to arise; second, there are key dates and political actions that make sense of the evolution of those relations and their escalation; and third, it was a course of action that journalists and policy media actors expressed as a struggle on communication control, mostly attributed to two clearly differentiated reasons: one perspective held by the populist government (and its allies) denouncing mainstream media

for acting as political actors boycotting the government's policies; and another view, supported mostly by mainstream media (and its allies), personalizing in Correa's narcissistic behavior an authoritarian drifting against the press, and accused the government of using the state and regulations to cover corruption. We will see in this chapter that the creation of media as 'the enemy of the people' for the populist leader, as is frequently framed by the scholarship and the public discussion (Kenny, 2020; Wojczewski, 2020), *was a process not fully determined from the beginning and co-dependent on the media's aggressive behavior against the new political actor in power. It didn't seem thus a pre-designed plan of the populist to, for instance, "sustain their base", as some authors suggest (Kellam & Stein, 2016: 40)*⁷⁰, but mostly the result of a struggle between the new political leader and a mainstream media that played a central position in the process, assuming perhaps what Albuquerque calls for the Brazilian case a problematic *Poder Moderador*⁷¹ role (2005), taking an active role in the political process. We will see how this conflictive situation would unfold in specific events, such as the bitter dispute between Correa and Teleamazonas television, the coup attempt in September 2010 or the popular referendum of 2011 to limit media ownership. Julian Assange's case and Correa's frequent appearances in international media would bring the Ecuadorean case to the global arena, analyzed and judged from a

⁷⁰ Kellam & Stein point out in the same paragraph correctly, I believe, the role that a previous deinstitutionalization played in the creation of conditions for the rise of Correa as a populist candidate. However, this institutional deterioration was far deeper than they seem to suggest. It not only included political parties but basically all institutions as we saw in the previous chapter. Moreover, the collapse of the Ecuadorean party system established after 1980 predated Correa at least since the mid-90s with the irruption of populist Abdalá Bucaram in the political scene; his presidential term would last seven months. A key difference between Correa and Bucaram was that the former was supported by the media, as we already have observed, and obviously it is hard to believe that had the media continued their support of Correa's political figure the clash would have happened or at least would have occurred with the same features.

⁷¹ 'Moderating power'.

particular perspective. The 2013 Communication Law would imply the final institutionalization and settling of Correa's media regime. Finally, through the discourses crystallized, opposed, and shared among journalists and policy actors, we will see also how this process was lived as a material and symbolic struggle connected to interests behind the scenes and the capacity of *both political and media actors* to control communication, asking the key question of who is the one who says what is (and what is not) newsworthy and important to the public.

1.- Correa's relation with media: a progressive tension, case by case, date by date

Most of domestic and influential international mainstream press were distinct detractors of Correa's government, and the president's relations with media would be traditionally framed as antagonistic or hostile, quickly reported as a narrative in which a leftist populist leader behaved aggressively against an unfriendly free press. However, Correa's interaction with Ecuadorean news media was positive before being elected, and during the first months of his presidency, the new president and the press didn't display the conflictive dynamic that characterized Correa's presidency. Things began to change progressively though, and May 2007 would be the first milestone in a path full of clashes. As we will see in this section, specific dates and key moments marked the evolution of the conflictive relations that would even attract international attention, especially after Correa granted political asylum to Julian Assange in the Ecuadorean embassy at London in 2012, and after the passing of the Communication Law in 2013.

However, none of these outcomes was initially planned by Rafael Correa's electoral platform in 2006 and during the first months and years of the presidency. The media issue emerged on the go, progressively, once the interaction between the new government and the mainstream media happened to become increasingly problematic. As a matter of fact, communication or media policy was barely mentioned in the 2006 electoral program; only one paragraph covered the issue, beyond telecommunication and Internet related projects⁷². In clear contrast, the 2009 electoral plan, offered several mentions of actions related to public media, media democratization or the right to plural and intercultural communication. But it was in the 2013 election platform where mentions to media democratization skyrocketed; just to give an idea, the term 'communication' appears only 8 times in the 2006 program (only once linked to media), 8 times in 2009 plan (now, many times associated to media) and 61 in the 2013 platform, most of the times related to media. These manifestations neatly reflect that media reform was decided and designed on the go as a consequence of a complex process that was not evident or observable in the beginning.

In fact, there weren't noticeable clashes between the new president and the mainstream media until May 2007. In that month two meaningful events happened. On 10, May, the new president filed a libel suit against Francisco Vivanco, president of the Quito-based *La Hora* newspaper. It would be the first legal action of Correa's list of famous court

⁷² The mention of media in the 2006 government plan reads: "We dream of a country where media introduce, in an objective and independent way, the national and international events; (a country) in which the living standard analysis of the Ecuadorean society is information's first priority; (a country) in which corruption denouncement is not a simple scandal; (a country) in which respect to the other's honor is a normal practice. A country where the journalistic profession is not among the riskiest jobs due to diverse forms of intolerance deployed from political or economic power spheres. A country where respect to adversaries' opinions, to dissidence and to the critique is guaranteed; in that country, the privileged of today, many of whom are the cause of the national tragedy, would even have the right to the nostalgic memory to remember their past with endless privileges, which would never be able to repeat".

cases against significant journalists. The leader argued that the editorial published by *La Hora*, titled “Official Vandalism”, caused him “moral damage” and was defamatory. The piece, which was based on protests against the schedule for the referendum to call for the constituent assembly in April, denounced that the government wanted to rule with “turmoil, rocks and sticks” and called Correa’s behavior “shameful”. This was also the first time that the Committee to Protect Journalists covered a case with Correa as the main character and his problematic relations with news media as the basic plot⁷³. The CPJ demanded that Correa drop his libel suit, a decision the leader didn’t take. The case would be in the courts for months. A week later, on May, 19 Correa clashed with two well-known journalists in an aggressive discussion broadcasted on the president’s weekly television show, *Dialogos con el Presidente*. As mentioned above, Emilio Palacio, *El Universo*’s opinion editor, and Carlos Jijón, Ecuavisa’s news director, carried out a heated debate with the young leader. The situation was remarkable. Palacio had been representing the editorial line of one of the most influential newspapers in the country, which, on the other hand, had lightly backed Correa in the 2006 elections; Jijón, was the news director of a television station that almost directly endorsed Correa as presidential candidate. In the case of Palacio, the discussion was centered around the role of the press in the 1999 financial crisis which, according to Correa, failed to report to the public what really happened; the leader also denounced that the press published “lies” based on a comment taken out of context, that his government was attacking the press. Palacio, visibly angry, countered that not all media performed similarly, and Correa apparently tired of the argument ordered the journalist to be expelled from the room.

⁷³ See the complete CPJ ‘Alert’ at <https://cpj.org/2007/05/ecuadoran-president-correa-should-drop-libel-suit/>

Months later, by the end of 2007, the relations between the government and the media were not broken or fatally wounded, but some doubts or a growing tension were emerging. In December, Cesar Ricaurte, an experienced journalist in media such as *El Universo* and Ecuavisa, founded Fundación Andina para la Observación y Estudio de Medios (Fundamedios), a non-governmental organization, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, an American bipartisan foundation, aiming to protect free speech and freedom of the press. In the following years, Fundamedios would become one of the most prominent associations denouncing Correa's attacks on press freedom and free speech, gathering the support not only from United States' governmental or non-governmental institutions, but also from the European Union, the German and the Canadian governments, besides other non-governmental international organizations, such as Freedom House or the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

As highlighted in the introduction, Carlos Vera, the popular host and pundit, also showed his discomfort with Correa when the president quarreled with Palacio and Jijón at the presidential palace, and certainly his sympathy towards the politician never recovered after that altercation. Actually, the relationship between Correa and Vera could even work as a meaningful representation of how the former productive association with the mainstream press changed and deteriorated. In February 2008, as parallel processes, while Correa tried to continue the legal proceedings for the suit filed against *La Hora*, contradicting the decision of the judge who didn't see anything illegal in the newspapers' editorial note, Vera responded to some of Correa's declarations in a long interview with the French journalist Bernard Fougères broadcasted in January. Correa, drinking wine, in a very informal and

open tone, criticized the news media in general (“mouthpieces of the opposition”), *El Universo*’s newspaper in particular (who, according to Correa, denied coverage to his government in response to a new policy banning tobacco advertisements in the press) and Vera, among other journalists. In fact, to the question “who are the journalists you admire the most?”, Correa took his time to answer nothing, despising Vera as a “megalomaniac” and accusing him of corruption in the 1990s, when Vera had a position in the Ecuadorean government. Curiously Correa defended Alfonso Espinosa de los Monteros, the most famous host at Ecuavisa, who in another confrontational comment, Correa had called a “news pornographer”. Vera, the former media “compañero” in the presidential campaign was furious; the pundit identified many unfulfilled promises made by Correa’s electoral platform and defended himself from corruption accusations.

It was early 2008, and the year in which Ecuador would vote for a new Constitution abounded in these types of invectives between a non-conventional politician who spared no strong words criticizing the press, always using the names of those he considered worthy of rejection, and a news media prone to using sensationalist style in its coverage and progressively more hostile to Correa and the constituent process. For instance, in the last interview given to Ecuavisa in June 2008 (Correa would never return to the private television’s studios), the first question uttered by the host, Espinosa de los Monteros, dealt, among other things, with a suspected plot to attack the president and a survey that claimed that only 37% of Ecuadoreans supported a new constitution⁷⁴. The show ended with Correa complaining about the lack of professional ethics on the part of another journalist who joined

⁷⁴ The 2008 Constitution was approved by a 63.94% of the vote in September of that year; 28.10% of Ecuadoreans rejected the charter.

Espinosa, and who, according to Correa “was seeding doubt and was doing politics”. In July, the seizure of Grupo Isaias’s media conglomerate by the government (besides other types of assets, which belonged to the same group), due to the financial debt acquired by that company after the 1999 crisis, troubled more the tense relations between the government and the media. Two important television broadcasters, Gamma TV, and TC television, with an important percentage of the audience’s share, were now controlled by the government. Correa’s administration promised to auction the conglomerate as soon as possible, but the operation sparked criticism and concerns among most of domestic media and international organizations, such as Committee to Protect Journalists, which posted an elaborated alert around the Ecuadorean case. This event and the creation of the first public television in Ecuador’s history, both of which will be discussed further in the next chapter, closed 2008 as an important moment for the transformation of the Ecuadorean media system. The seized Isaias conglomerate would never be sold by the government, neither by Correa nor by the following Moreno and Lasso administrations.

1.1.- From guerrilla to open media war

In 2009, with a recently approved Constitution, the newly created public media and the indirect control over the Isaias media conglomerate, Correa faced presidential and legislative elections. The former economist won the election with 52% of the vote but his party, Alianza Pais, lacked the legislative majority in the national assembly. In the ranks of *oficialismo* talks had begun upon a new comprehensive legislation on communication that the 2008 Constitution envisaged. This year, furthermore, flourished with tensions, clashes

and even violent altercations between media opposed to the government and Correa's administration and his supporters. For instance, in its third full report on Ecuador, the CPJ enumerated at least four violent feuds against media citing Fundamedios' sources, in which alleged government supporters attacked news stations and journalists, destroying buildings, equipment or even physically harassing the companies' staff. In May and December, for instance, "unidentified individuals tossed homemade explosives outside the Quito offices of Teleamazonas", reported CPJ, and in the summer two journalists were briefly jailed due to libel charges.

That television station, at the time controlled by banker Fidel Egas, also owner of Banco Pichincha, the largest private bank in the country, was turned into one of the fiercest enemies of Correa's administration. Teleamazonas defied in June a ban, established in 2008⁷⁵, on airing bullfighting shows outside permitted hours, and slowed the sale of part of its ownership, since under the new Constitution, financial firms weren't allowed to own a majority share of media companies. Harsh criticism or comical imitations of Correa, all of them enveloped by the strong sensationalist tone of the channel, clashed with a president apparently very sensitive to bad reviews. Probably the most poignant case, was the one presented in Teleamazonas in August by Fernando Balda, a political activist (formerly affiliated with Alianza Pais, and at the time a militant of the Sociedad Patriótica, Lucio

⁷⁵ Prohibiting broadcasting bullfighting on television during daytime hours (before 9 pm) was established in 2008 by Conartel and contested by the sides involved, which in some cases alleged their right of free speech and expression, and press freedom to broadcast those shows. Conartel, which argued the violent nature of bullfighting images, supported its decision on two articles from the Radio and Television Broadcasting law from 1975, which evaluate "the artistic, cultural and moral value of events and shows" and the consideration of those shows broadcasted before 9 pm as suitable for all audiences. This specification on Conartel's regulations was usually followed by broadcasters, but in June Teleamazonas aired bullfighting images at 8:30 pm, resulting in 20 dollars fine. Bullfighting itself would be banned in most provinces in Ecuador after the 2011 popular consultation.

Gutiérrez's populist party) who, basing his claims on an audio recorded during the drafting of the Constitution, declared that the charter presented for referendum in 2008 was a farce and not the real text discussed by the constituent assembly. In a few words, Balda was accusing Correa of faking the Constitution and committing treason against the nation with this action. Teleamazonas widely reported Balda's theory based on scarce and confusing evidence. A furious Correa threatened to close the station for broadcasting false information and called Conartel (the National Council of Radio and Television), the regulatory body responsible to monitor the distribution and usage of television frequencies, to act. Months before, Conartel had fined Teleamazonas for airing information deemed to be false, questioning the legality of vote counting in Guayaquil during the Constitution referendum.

Just that summer, Carlos Vera, now transfigured into one of Correa's fiercest enemies, was interviewed by Jorge Ramos, a popular anchorman at Univision, the American Spanish speaking television. Vera had quit his job at Ecuavisa that April after a confusing story with Jaime Nebot, the conservative Guayaquil mayor, and Maria de los Angeles Duarte, a representative for Alianza Pais, the oficialista party controlled by Correa. According to Vera, Ecuavisa wanted to impose on him an editorial line with which he disagreed. "What (Correa) does is to insult the press, to discredit it, to slander it, but he is a smart person, so he sends his minions through some mechanisms for intimidation, in this case, Conartel", Vera said to Ramos about his situation⁷⁶, and the general picture of the relations between the president and the press. "There is danger for freedom of speech and

⁷⁶ "Pressures of Chavez" produced his resignation, explained Vera to the direct question of Ramos about his dismissal from Ecuavisa. Vera exhibited an evident slip, since probably he meant Correa instead, but the mistake also speaks about the general regional situation back then.

journalism, but at the same time there is a stark resistance of a few newspapers and radios and some televisions; what Correa is doing is an improved and very well disguised franchise of what Chaves does in Venezuela”, he stated. Ramos asked him about the contrast between his support of Correa’s candidacy in 2006 and the present repudiation, to which Vera responded that Correa, simply put, committed treason to him and to all those who followed him in 2006. Next, Vera talked about Correa’s brother, Fabricio, at the time investigated by a group of journalists about his alleged corrupt contracts with the government. Finally, Ramos pointed out that according to polls it seemed Vera could have a shot as a presidential candidate. To this, Vera concluded that he had considered that option several times and declined the idea, but now it was different: “Maybe politics is the only way of looking for democracy in Ecuador and to protect myself; I need a status, I need to be that politician from the opposition that I’m not right now!”.

Finally, in December 2009, Teleamazonas’s broadcasting was suspended for 72 hours, due to “public order implications” of its reporting about the consequences for the fishing industry of Venezuela’s PDVSA gas exploration activities in Punà island. This event (as had happened with the audio of the alleged falsification of the 2008 Constitution and the presumed polling falsification story in Guayaquil) was reported with very scarce evidence, the usual sensationalist tone, and the obvious intention of attacking the government. Anyhow, the governmental action had been in the making in the previous months, probably at the same pace than the television was broadcasting stories against the government. Once TC Television was under government control and Ecuavisa seemed to be in truce with Correa’s administration, the big media adversary happened to be Teleamazonas. As a matter

of fact, two months before, in October 2009, an executive order (Decreto Ejecutivo) issued by the president had created a new official position, the Telecommunications Supervisor – back then filled by Fabian Jaramillo, an engineer–, merging competences of Conartel and the Telecommunications Council (Conatel). It was this Supervisor who decreed the suspension. As highlighted before, the incident attracted the international media attention and produced the unified condemnation of the Ecuadorean opposition, who supported some protests outside Teleamazonas’ headquarters.

However, in 2010 the conflict between private media and the government escalated even more to a state of open war, especially after the complex events experienced on September the 30th when Correa’s government suffered a coup attempt. This year, though, started with good news for the mainstream media side in this particular guerrilla war: a provincial court ruled in February that Teleamazonas’ suspension had been illegal, against due process’ norms and harming rights of freedom of speech and information of the television station and of the citizens. Correa’s administration, meanwhile, had been using profusely the so-called “cadenas nacionales” or government interruption of the normal media transmission to inform about important specific issues, usual in many Latin American countries, especially in South America. According to Fundamedios data, Correa had surpassed the Venezuelan government’s record of cadenas nacionales with a total of 233 in 2009, compared to Venezuela’s average of 195 in the last 10 years. And to put the ‘cadenas nacionales’ phenomenon in perspective, a report published in 2014 by Alianza Regional por

la Libre Expresión e Información⁷⁷ alerted of the abuse of this system of governmental communication, which very often interrupted usual broadcasting for vague and arbitrary reasons. For this organization, Ecuador was the champion in broadcasting cadenas nacionales in South America with 666 emissions in only eight months in 2013. Fernando Alvarado, the Secretary of Communication between 2009 and 2015, interviewed in 2010 by BBC's global channel explained that this policy "it is not a good strategy, but what else can be done before so much disinformation and so many lies and when power groups are intimately related with media". Alvarado added, metaphorically that the situation was "as if every day one gets in the ring and has to think how to defend himself from so many punches".

Another issue latent during that year, besides the government's usage of cadenas and legal actions, was Teleamazonas's ownership, whose composition still challenged the provision established by the Constitution banning financial companies from controlling media conglomerates' capital. In July, Correa reminded the banker Fidel Egas that he had to disinvest before October, once the deadline of two years to accomplish the new legislation was finished. "Either you are bankers or journalists, but you cannot be both things at the same time", Correa said in a press conference. In early September, Egas himself announced to *El Universo's* reporters that Teleamazonas "was already sold, and you will have some news about it", without adding anything else. In the meantime, another journalist, Jorge Ortiz, very critical of Correa, resigned from his position in Teleamazonas, so as not "to be a problem" in the selling process. However, Egas didn't make precise anything about the

⁷⁷ Self-defined as an alliance of non-governmental organizations aiming to protect and to expand free speech information access is based in Uruguay. More information about this specific organization at <http://www.alianzaregional.net/nuestra-red/#HISTORIA>

change in the ownership until October when it was announced that shares were distributed to Peruvian media group La República (30%), a group of Teleamazonas' employees (48%) and some "friends" in Quito and Guayaquil (22%)⁷⁸. Two other groups with similar problems although much less audience, Eljuri and Grupo Caravana, didn't share any information about the change in their ownership with the deadline finished, although some years later Correa's government accused them of "simulated selling"; something similar was claimed about Egas's relationship with Teleamazonas, which, according to Correa, was still controlled by the banker.

Yet, in the middle of this combat between the government and the mainstream media possibly the most dramatic event during Correa's long presidency occurred. September the 30th in the morning, mainly police but also some military forces started to occupy barracks, the national assembly and strategic points (such as airports and crossroads) in Quito, Guayaquil and other cities in the country protesting a government reform, passed two days before, that integrated the complex compensation system of the police and military forces (made of bonuses, specific benefits and customized wages) into the public servants' general system. Roads were cut, nodal points were taken, police disappeared from the streets and some supermarkets were looted; turmoil and a sensation of chaos invaded the country.

Very quickly, Correa decided to go to the main police barracks in Quito with the Minister of Interior, allegedly to dialogue with some of the demonstration's leaders; once there, very badly received and booed (with some of the assembled shouting "Lucio President", vindicating the former president and colonel who was deposed amid strong

⁷⁸ More info at https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2010/10/101022_ecuador_banqueros_lav

popular unrest in April 2005), Correa defied the demonstrators and defended his policies from one window at the police building. “If you want to kill the president, here he is, kill him, if you are brave enough, kill him, if you have the power, kill him, instead of being concealed within the mob”, a totally agitated Correa cried. Minutes later, the president’s entourage moved to a hospital within the same building complex; on their way to the hospital, a tear gas canister almost hit Correa in the head; the president, who recently had surgery in one knee and used a cane to walk, was escorted wearing a gas mask. The convoy was harassed by the mob, some of the protesters even tried to hit on Correa’s knees. Once at the hospital, Correa and his assistants were barricaded in one room in the neonatology area. A helicopter tried to rescue the president but couldn’t land and Correa had to act using the assistants’ phones and an electronic signature procedure; from there he declared the state of emergency and was interviewed by public media twice. In total, he was held at the hospital for 11 hours, until a group of soldiers and special forces came to the aid with a spectacular rescue operation, which was broadcasted by the media live.

“I crossed the thin red line [dividing journalism and politics] when it needed to be crossed, on 30-S”, recalled the journalist Giovanna Tassi in a conversation in the summer of 2017 in the public radio studio, when she was still working as director of Radio Publica del Ecuador. “I interviewed the president around 1 pm; because we didn’t know how the president was, there was confusion at the government, they were all shocked. I remember I phoned Vinicio Alvarado [one of Correa’s closest ministers and an expert in communication] and told him, give me the president, if the president doesn’t talk... give me his phone. [Next] thanks to the phone of one of his aides. . . we made him a very emotional interview, because

the situation was very unpleasant. He said goodbye, sending hugs to his wife in case he would die, hugs to his children; we didn't know what to do. I was sitting there, with two persons, one of them is now the general editor. I said to them: 'look, as a director I assume the responsibility, I'm going to tell everybody that we need to go to the police hospital to defend the president, because today they are going to kill the president, they are not going to stop, because the president finished his interview saying they were at the roof, trying to break into his room by the window. . . I don't know if you have heard this expression, 'mensaje a García'⁷⁹. . . it is a way of saying 'you do this', but it is told in a different manner. . . So, this was [the president's] 'mensaje a García', and then I said in the radio that we had to go to the hospital to defend democracy, our institutions, and the chief of state as an institution. And off they went, all of them outside the hospital. People started to come over from the provinces; it was impressive. I didn't believe until that day in such power of media. The people went to the hospital even risking their lives, there were snipers. . . So that 30-S we were born as a citizen's radio because it was dramatic; because it was the people: the people saved the president".

On the other side of the media spectrum though, the situation was different. The state of emergency decree, issued around 1 pm, allowed the government to suspend or control communications in the country and all radio and television stations were obliged to broadcast the "cadena nacional" which public media (including Radio Pública del Ecuador) was airing. The order was mandatory from 2 pm to 8 pm of that day. For 6 hours, the government, with the president retained at the hospital, had total control over media, except over digital

⁷⁹ 'Message to Garcia'.

communications, although its importance at this point is quite questionable and understudied⁸⁰. However, many journalists (from private or public media) were still doing their job during the crisis, and several reporters were injured or harassed during the protests by police rebels⁸¹. At 8 pm, with the president still at the hospital, all media (private and public) were allowed to broadcast the crisis, including the spectacular assault of a group of 200 military and loyal police forces that suffered a rain of bullets to enter the building, and to escape with the president.

And, if thousands of citizens went to the police hospital, took the streets to support the president and even fought against the rebels, other citizens probably had expectations that Correa would be deposed. According to statements aired by Ecuador TV, voices of the opposition were asking for the president's resignation while the leader was held. And actually at 6 pm a group of individuals broke into the studios of Ecuador TV in North Quito, at that moment one of the few offline sources of information available. The group, vexed by what they saw as the government's aim to control the press, and defending some of the

⁸⁰ Though internet accessibility had improved the last years, the use of digital communications was still limited in the country; only 12% of the population had internet access in 2010, according to Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos and there is not any substantial empirical research published covering the event. Valdez Vélez (2020) proposes in her master's dissertation that private media's news and opinion quickly moved to Twitter once the suspension of communications was ordered. The dissertation though doesn't elaborate about the content of the discussion held on Twitter before, during and after the 'cadena nacional' was established; it only claims that opinion tweets slightly surpassed information tweets and that public media's posts on Twitter only represented 1% of the tweets posted during the cadena, against 70% published by citizens, 21% by journalists and 8% by private media. After the cadena, those numbers varied, increasing the citizens' participation (86%) and private media (9.6%), and diminishing journalists' posts (4%); the government didn't publish anything on Twitter after the mandatory cadena nacional.

⁸¹ There is clearly a lack of information about this alleged instigations and harm caused by the rebels against journalists; there is a list of those affected (<https://web.archive.org/web/20101005233259/http://www.eldiario.com.ec/noticias-manabi-ecuador/167567-cerca-de-22-agresiones-a-periodistas-durante-la-jornada-de-ayer>), and Reporters without Borders denounced the situation (<http://atencionecuador.com/rsf-pide-justicia-para-periodistas-agredidos-en-ecuador-durante-motn/>).

rebels' claims, went inside pushing away the small contingent of security in place and smashing the main entrance. Minutes later one of their representatives, who happened to be a member of the opposition's Partido Social Cristiano, explained that they wanted "the president to realize that we don't want him to be killed. . . we are just people who are discontent, people who have to be considered when passing the laws".⁸²

The dramatic day ended around 9 pm, with Correa at Carondelet presidential palace safe and sound. The leader, cheered by the crowd gathered at Plaza Grande, blamed former president Lucio Gutiérrez for the attack— "no one of these rebels had read the law, no one", Correa repeated before the crowd—, although several elements of the day would remain unclear. Two things, I believe, should be beyond reasonable doubt. First, this was an extremely conflictive situation (three persons died and almost three hundred were wounded) that could have led to Correa's deposition (by death or resignation) and therefore must be qualified as a coup. During the evening, several world leaders communicated their support to the legitimate administration (including the United States government, all Latin American presidents, and many European governments) and at 2 pm, the armed forces confirmed their support to the president once the state of emergency was declared. Secondly, the whole drama was transformed into a televised spectacle, especially after the cadena was removed at 8 pm and all channels were broadcasting Correa's rescue from the hospital. In some way,

⁸² This quote and the precedent events are based on a set of sources about the 2010 Ecuador crisis. There is an interesting documentary called *30S Muchedumbre* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVCcNk9tLV8>) with more than one hour of footage taken during that day. I have consulted also domestic media (<https://especiales.elcomercio.com/2011/09/30s/>) and international media (with articles published by the *New York Times*, *El Pais* or the *BBC*) to clarify the facts surrounding the event.

September the 30th in Ecuador honorably entered the recent history of televised coups, which Patricio Guzmán inaugurated with his classic *La Batalla de Chile* in 1973.

However, the interpretation of the events, of what had happened that day, took different directions. During those tragic hours some journalists and pundits in private media began to doubt about qualifying the event as a coup attempt, rather suggesting that it was a sort of inside job staged by Correa and his followers to strengthen their control of the country. They alleged that the events were only broadcasted and narrated by public media and that the truth was hidden by Correa's allies and governmental sources. Their narration of the events, supported by most of private media, blamed Correa for fomenting violence of what was just a mutiny (instead of trying to engage a dialogue when the president visited the police's barracks in Quito) looking for his own political goals and transforming himself into some sort of a hero or martyr at the expense of the lives of those killed and wounded that day. Some of these versions blamed Correa for ordering the shooting of mutineers and innocent citizens at the hospital. So, in a few words, 30-S as a topic became a controversial story, used by the opposition and *oficialismo* to support their political objectives.

Now, it should be claimed, a total war between the government and private media was performed: the administration accused the opposition and private media for instigating the coup, and the opposition and the media, denounced that the president had orchestrated the operation to increase his power. In February 2011, Emilio Palacio, mentioned above as one of the main characters in the first clashes between Correa and the media, published an opinion article in *El Universo* in which he insinuated that Correa had committed crimes

against humanity during 30-s and qualified the president as a “dictator”⁸³. The president sued Palacio’s article for exorbitant penalties (80 million dollars in fines and three years of prison), and the courts finally declared Palacio guilty in July 2011, fining the newspaper’s publishers and Palacio 40 million dollars. The case was appealed and in December 2012, Palacio and the publishers were fined 30 million dollars. Once the case was won, Correa withdrew charges. Palacio, for his part, would resign from his position at *El Universo* in 2011 and would flee to Miami in 2012; the journalist would be granted political asylum by the United States government. The *El Universo* case was finally resolved by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ten years later, in 2021, ruling that the Ecuadorean state had violated Palacio’s and *El Universo*’s rights.

It is interesting to note how this event followed by controversial versions about what really happened around a specific dramatic event, dividing the political and media spectrum has been replicated in other contexts. Samet, for instance, expounds the case of a photographer killed during the coup against Chavez on April 11, 2002 (2019, 89-110) as the perfect illustration of a populist logic, shared by the *chavista* government and the opposition, which cannot reconcile a common truth, based on the facts, about what happened during that day. Something similar happened in Bolivia during and after the coup that ousted Evo Morales from power during the 2019 presidential election. There was not a clear shared understanding of what happened those days, especially inside the South American nation where the right-wing opposition and mainstream media denied the existence of a coup, but not only. Even the most respected international media, such as *The New Yorker* or *El País*,

⁸³ The article is titled “No a las mentiras” published on February 6. Available at <https://www.eluniverso.com/2011/02/06/1/1363/mentiras.html>

didn't offer a clear interpretation pointing out that what occurred to Morales⁸⁴ was actually a coup. How could be identified a situation with unelected politicians seizing power, openly persecuting political opponents, many of them hurriedly leaving the country? Interestingly, these cases seem to be part of a more general pattern beyond Latin America with very similar events in many different countries where usually a dramatic incident, central for the national political discussion, cannot be understood transversally or following a widely shared explanation⁸⁵.

The months from the coup in Ecuador through the end of 2011, in any case, would be prolific not only in the judicialization of the conflict between the government and the media. As detailed before, investors with interests in financial firms finally sold their shares on media by October 2010 (although the government still distrusted these operations) but the following year Correa decided to go further in limitations on media ownership. In May 2011, a popular consultation in the form of a referendum asked the Ecuadorean citizens their

⁸⁴ See more at John Lee-Anderson's piece published by *The New Yorker* (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/03/23/the-fall-of-evo-morales>) or at *El País's* article based on some selected expert's views, with two Bolivian scholars denying the existence of a coup, and one approach (from a non-Bolivian regional scholar) defending that "all elements of a coup are present in the Bolivian case".

⁸⁵ For instance, in Spain, the vote for independence in Catalonia organized in October 2017 has triggered an extremely controversial discussion about what happened before, during and after that vote took place. For Spanish rightwing parties and rightwing media, it was a coup attempt and the Catalan politicians that supported the vote had to be prosecuted and jailed for violent rebellion and sedition; for the Spanish left and the majority of political parties in Catalonia, it was mostly a huge popular protest and a constitutional crisis against the Spanish state (back then ruled by the conservative Partido Popular) or the exercise of self-determination of the Catalan people, according to Catalan nationalists. In any case, even after the events were tried by the Supreme Court, there is not a shared or transversal accepted version. Similarly, in the United States, the presidential election in 2020, according to all facts fairly won by the democrat candidate, Joseph Biden, was presented as a rigged election by the other contender, far-right populist Donald Trump, supported by his political and media allies. The contested versions of what happened, or the refusal of a large percentage of the American population to confirm that Biden had legitimately won, fueled by Trump himself and rightwing media, led to an unprecedented constitutional crisis with a mob of Trump supporters and rightwing sympathizers invading the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Today some commentators characterize those events as a coup attempt, while others, closer to Trump's camp and right-wing media, deny the coup theory repeating alleged electoral fraud and justified social anger to explain the Capitol Assault.

verdict about a total of 10 questions related to different topics (the judicial system, limiting bullfighting or banning casinos' operations, for instance) and the media issue would be situated at the center of the discussion. Question 3 asked the Ecuadorean people for their consent to prohibit non-media companies (their directors and main shareholders) from owning media companies and vice versa. Overall, the referendum was approved by a narrow majority; in the case of the new limitations on media ownership, 52% of the population supported the measure.

Finally, another bitter dispute between Correa and well-known representatives of Ecuadorean journalism, would emerge, develop and go to the courts between 2010 and 2011. It was the 'Gran Hermano' case, based on the alleged collusion and obscure dealings between Correa's government and Correa's brother, Fabricio, who owned construction companies. A series of articles published by newspaper *Expreso* allegedly provided evidence of the corrupt practices; and they even ended up published as a book in 2010 titled with that word game, *Gran Hermano* (Big Brother), referring to Correa's relative and the president's role as an all-powerful (and corrupt) leader. A huge scandal was aired by private media. Correa sued the authors of the book, Juan Carlos Calderón and Christian Zurita, who in February 2012 would be sentenced to pay 2 million dollars for moral damages. The president eventually would drop the suit, but the case, alongside Palacio's sentence, would spark widespread criticism against the Ecuadorean government among international organizations and the international media. However, these events, actions and legal cases that made the Ecuadorean case important for experts in the field of press freedom or freedom of speech, would turn pale before Correa's next *coup de grâce* in his particular battle against

mainstream media or the ‘corrupt press’. The Australian hacker, Julian Assange, was granted asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy at London in August 2012. And Rafael Correa now would receive more headlines and global public notoriety than any previous Ecuadorean president would have ever dreamed of. Domestic mainstream media first criticized the populist president for his contradictory remarks and actions about Wikileaks⁸⁶, but took sides very quickly against granting Assange asylum due to the likely deterioration of relations with the United States government and because of Assange’s background and personality, portraying the Australian as a problematic figure associated to sex scandals and to shady habits or behaviors.

1.2.- A global media war

The content analysis of a substantial sample of stories published by the international press^{87 88}, whose selection was based on the words ‘Ecuador’ and ‘media’, or ‘Ecuador’ and

⁸⁶ There are several examples of this framing of the Julian Assange affair, especially at the beginning of the story in 2012. See at *El Comercio*, using the case to criticize Correa’s administration (<https://www.elcomercio.com/opinion/mi-amigo-assange.html>, <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/wikileaks-ahora-buena.html> or <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/analisis-paradojica-peticion-asilo.html>) or at El Universo (<https://www.eluniverso.com/2012/08/19/1/1355/julian-assange-representa-libre-expresion-regimen.html>, <https://www.eluniverso.com/2012/08/22/1/1355/julian-assange-sospechoso-cuatro-delitos-sexuales-dos-acusadoras.html> or <https://www.eluniverso.com/2012/11/29/1/1355/assange-considera-ecuador-como-un-pais-insignificante.html/>)

⁸⁷ Here I’m including media such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, BBC, CNN, Fox News, besides France’s *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and France 24, Italy’s *Corriere della Sera* or RAI TV, Spain’s *El País* and RTVE, or Germany’s DW and *Spiegel*. Other international media such as the Telesur (funded by the Venezuelan, Bolivian, Nicaraguan and, during Correa’s tenure, the Ecuadorean governments) or Russia’s RT are not included in this sample which understands the hegemonic ‘international media’ as that media belonging to the West (defined basically by Western Europe and the United States). These media are rather considered part of alternative media differentiated from the communicative space historically dominated by the above-mentioned media companies, funded by governments or private corporations.

⁸⁸ More precisely, basic content analysis was run on *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Le Figaro*, *El País*, *Corriere della Sera* and *Der Spiegel*. The research utilized Nexis Uni, a data and content search software, and used the words “Ecuador” and “media”, or “Ecuador” and “press freedom”. More stories came out under the

the ‘press’, produced clear results and a distinctive framing: 2012 and 2013, the year when Assange entered the Ecuadorean embassy and the year in which Correa passed the Communication Law and also offered asylum to Edward Snowden (the former National Security Agency consultant and whistleblower), international media increased their coverage exponentially on Ecuador as never had happened before, and offered a specific narrative about it. The Australian hacker and journalist faced in 2012 sexual assault allegations in Sweden and a divided public opinion about his role in making public in 2010 hundreds of thousands of United States’ diplomatic and military reports, including classified operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was ironical, most of international media highlighted in their coverage of the case, that the Latin American leader who was being denounced for promoting self-censorship or repressing independent media at home, was now harboring on Ecuadorean soil (although situated in London) the founder of Wikileaks, the news leaks international organization, specialized “in the analysis and publication of large datasets of censored or otherwise restricted official materials involving war, spying and corruption”, according to the website of the organization. Correa had been interviewed by the Australian journalist in his Julian Assange Show in Russian Television in May 2012; the Ecuadorean leader had recalled the attempted coup two years before and warned of “corrupt media’s” power to set the agenda. Assange introduced Correa as “a left-wing populist who has changed the face of his country; unlike his predecessors he holds a PhD in Economics, and

first type of search, although the pattern was the same for any media outlet. The search was limited to Nexis Uni data set, hence the absence of most read French newspapers, such as *Le Monde* or *Liberation*, not covered by that system.

according to the United States embassy he is the most popular president in Ecuador's democratic history".

Articles published⁸⁹ by international media about Ecuador in 2012 and 2013 focused thus mostly on three topics: the Julian Assange case, Correa's repressive policies and actions against independent or free media, and, to a lesser extent, Edward Snowden. As it was mentioned above, the 'contradictory' framing of Correa, the repressor, helping Assange, the press freedom champion, dominated many articles. For instance, in August 2012, *The New York Times* featured a long story reporting about Julian Assange's asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy, with details about his stay at the building since June of that year. In the same article, Correa's government troubling relations with the media were recalled, highlighting the contradiction of Assange's views on press freedom with his Ecuadorean connection, besides the Australian's clarification that he had received an offer to take refuge during his interview with Correa in May. In the case of *The Guardian*, the British newspaper published an article on June 19 (the day Assange sought refuge at the embassy), entitled "Ecuador's free speech record at odds with Julian Assange's bid for openness", which stressed the similar contradictory element as the *Times* did. Quoting *El Universo's* sources, CPJ's reports

⁸⁹ Illustrating this coverage with data, *The New York Times's* mentions of Ecuador and media; or Ecuador and the press, depending on the cultural context, passed from 14 in 2011, to 34 in 2012, and 29, in 2013. In the case of British *The Guardian*, the same type of mentions increased from 16 in 2011, to 50 and 57 in 2012 and 2013; for Spain's *El País*, probably the medium with more cultural and economic links with Ecuador (especially due to the shared language, and the huge community of Ecuadorean immigrants in the Iberian country) the figures passed from 39 in 2010 to 56 in 2011, 68 in 2012 and 48 in 2013. The limited coverage of Ecuador at Italy (a country, however, hosting a large community of Ecuadorean immigrants) also raised from almost nothing in 2011 (2 stories published) to be part of the conversation in the public opinion (10 and 12 articles posted in 2012 and 2013, respectively). Something similar happened to *Le Figaro*; the French conservative newspaper hardly covered Ecuador and its press until 2013, increasing its stories from 3 in 2011 and 2012, to 13 in 2013. Finally, the almost inexistent interest on Ecuador's issues with media in Germany awoke with 3 articles in 2012 and 2013.

and critical Ecuadorean journalists, *The Guardian* story totally centered the reporting on Ecuador's "tenuous respect for international human rights law".

The focus, angle and tone of the articles was similar in *El País*, although the Spanish newspaper had already increased its coverage of stories about Ecuador and the media in 2011 and centered the discussion mostly on criticizing Correa's actions against the press. For instance, in January 2012, the newspaper published an interview with César Pérez, *El Universo's* subdirector in which the journalist declared that "Correa lives in a permanent conflict with media". Three other major European newspapers, *Le Figaro*, *Corriere della Sera* and *Spiegel*, repeated the framing established by *The New York Times*, showing their interest in Ecuador once the Assange's case was generating media hype. All of them criticized the Australian hacker and emphasized the contradictory partnership between the radical press freedom defender and Correa. For instance, the Italian newspaper headed an article in August 2012, "Praising Ecuador, which saves Assange (but imprisons journalists)".

In 2013 most of the stories were centered again on Assange and especially on Edward Snowden, the young National Security Agency (NSA) consultant who decided to uncover more classified information about the purportedly partnership between the United States Government and major digital corporations establishing a veritable Orwellian online surveillance over the whole world. It seemed that Snowden, once identified as whistleblower in Russia, wanted to take refuge in Ecuador. Correa's government didn't deny this information, and Ecuador happened to be a sort of center of a peculiar war defending Wikileaks' founder and activists opposed to new forms of digital surveillance. At the same time, the international press, again, echoed Correa's problematic relation with Ecuadorean

media and reported about a new Communication Law, nicknamed as a ‘gag law’ that questioned press freedom and democratic rights.

On top of that, Correa won the presidential and legislative elections that February in a landslide. The leader was now globally known and strongly supported at home; an interesting (and newsworthy) topic emerged from Ecuador around the figure of Correa, the Assange-Snowden case, and the question of press freedom. For example, in July 2013, *The New York Times* published a long story that explained in detail the effects of Correa’s actions against the “independent media”, advancing the problems that the new legislation would cause to free media; the piece focused on *Vanguardia*, a weekly magazine that had closed in that month, with quotes from two of Correa’s old enemies, Francisco Vivanco (*Vanguardia*’s editor and also publisher of *La Hora*), and Juan Carlos Calderón, co-author of *Gran Hermano*. Correa’s view was also reflected in the story; and Assange and Snowden were mentioned. The article finished with the journalist posing a not so easy to respond question to Correa, and to the readers: “And who decides which press is good and which is bad? [asked the journalist] ‘Society, through the law,’ Mr. Correa said. ‘Telling the truth, that’s the good press. Lies, that’s the bad press. There’s no room for confusion there’”.

In conclusion, what had been a domestic or even regional situation, in 2012 attracted the international media’s attention; and all was caused by the political decision of a charismatic leader which wouldn’t stop there, even offering asylum to Edward Snowden and passing an ambitious law that was born under the global observation. Correa, in any case, wanted to increase his international exposure and influence, and allied with alternative media actors, such as Assange or Snowden, or emerging international media companies, such as

Telesur (funded partially by the Ecuadorean government) or RT, controlled by the Russian state. From there, Correa's relationship with the media, domestic and international, achieved a sort of stable tension. In the international arena, Ecuador and Correa remained as a recurrent topic with Assange permanently confined at the embassy, but without the media hype reached in the commented years. The populist leader, however, became a global figure for the left and as such would be depicted in many alternative progressive media in Europe and the United States, although without too much importance for mainstream media⁹⁰. At home, the judicialization of some specific news and cases, initiated by Correa back in 2007, stopped. Now, a new body of legislation was especially designed to regulate media and communication. Correa continued producing his weekly populist show, *Enlace Ciudadano*⁹¹, and public and seized media showed a solid appraisal of the populist president that apparently had magnified his public image with his intense international activity. All this would only change when Correa left power, passing his presidential legacy to his former vice-president, Lenin Moreno. This, of course, included Julian Assange who almost since 2012 was framed as a problematic issue by the Ecuadorean mainstream media as it was mentioned before. Public media, on the other hand, had support sharply Assange's fight for

⁹⁰ About Correa's coverage in French media Pierre Carles' documentary, *Opération Correa, épisode 1: Les Ânes ont soif*, is actually structured around the question of the lack of coverage of French mainstream media during Correa's visit to France in 2014. In spite of Ecuador's impressive figures on decreasing poverty and a better redistribution of wealth, in spite of Correa's ability to speak French and his knowledge in restructuring financial debt, almost none of France's mainstream media covered Correa's meeting with President François Hollande or Correa's speech at La Sorbonne, or interviewed Correa, the documentary claims. In other words, Carles's film, which would qualify as the alternative progressive media that had been supported Correa during his presidency and afterwards, asks if mainstream media are really working as journalistic institutions (covering someone who is newsworthy) or making invisible (or framing in a negative way) something that contradicts their interests and logics.

⁹¹ 'Citizen's link', in English.

a power's transparency not fully provided by mainstream media⁹². In 2019, private media and public media under Moreno, would applaud in unison Assange's handing-over to the British authorities.

2.- Reasons behind the clash: Communication control, the *caudillo* and political economy

I learnt that Correa didn't have a particular negative coverage by mainstream media during the 2006 campaign and his tenure as Finance Minister in 2005 during one of the first interviews I had in Quito with one of Correa's most famous media adversaries, Juan Carlos Calderón. Instantly, I was intrigued about the reasons that turned that cordial relationship into a bitter conflict between the government and the so-called "corrupted press". What had happened to Correa to become that monster as he was portrayed by so many journalists and pundits? And what were the reasons for Correa to distrust the press, or for starting to attack media so harshly? I directly asked these questions to almost all the subjects⁹³ that participated in this research, since many of them had lived directly through their profession and position how the clash had emerged and evolved; when I didn't (especially in the first round of interviews and ethnographic work in which I wasn't not so familiar with the case, the

⁹² For instance, Ecuadorean journalist Orlando Pérez would publish a book with information provided by Wikileaks about the Ecuadorean political situation between 2005 and 2009, presenting obviously a positive framing about Assange's work on transparency and the Australian role as a sort of alternative media to counterbalance mainstream media biased or scarce coverage about the events. The book was published in 2013, when he was director of state-owned newspaper *El Telégrafo*. See more at Pérez, O. (2013) *Wikileaks en la Mitad del Mundo*. Quito: Editogran.

⁹³ They are 27 out of 31 participants. Of those four not responding, three of them weren't at the country when the clash occurred in the period 2007-2008. The only one present in the country or with some knowledge about what happened is Christian Luzuriaga, executive manager in Kantar Ibope when interviewed, who only spoke about media markets issues.

processes and the actors involved) this shift between Correa and the media came up in the conversations very often. This section is made out of their responses to those questions, and as we will see, the clash between Correa, the populist president, and the private mainstream media, was seen as a complex issue, in which distinct discourses happened to offer different reasons, although one view cut across sectors and ideological positions: according to a majority of journalist and policy actors Correa's and media's struggle was basically a war of communication control, a battle over who was able to set the political agenda. This struggle was, I believe, a material and symbolic clash, that challenged and moved positions in the Ecuadorean media system produced by, at least, two different reasons, one focused on Correa's defiance on media's established interests, and another centered around Correa's personality or charismatic (and also problematic) behavior that exceeded the borders or limitations established between orthodox political and media actors.

The qualitative data analyzed from those long interviews point out to several consistent discourses, with varied and meaningful ramifications, about the reasons that led to the clash between Correa (his party, political movement and followers) and the mainstream media. After a complex work of primary and secondary coding of elaborated responses, observing discourse tracing across the subjects, in relation to the participants ideological and sectorial positionality regarding Correa's government and policies, I believe that there are at least four meaningful discourses clearly present among the interviewees. And most of the time they appear merged among each other. Eighteen participants out of 27 pointed out explicitly (twelve subjects) or implicitly (six individuals) that the key factor was a power struggle around 'control', 'dominance', 'imposition' or 'scrutiny'. However, they

used two very different angles: those positioned against Correa (many of them working for private media, 8 individuals in total) argued that the president's egocentric *caudillo* behavior critically fueled the clash, together with the goal of controlling journalists or communication to evade scrutiny and corruption charges; those closer to Correa's stances (and many of them working in public media, amounting to 9 subjects), in contrast, argued that the media, "acting as political actors", wanted to control the government to prevent the government's policies to be implemented. Some manifested these views explicitly using expressions such as 'control', 'dominance', 'scrutiny', 'imposition' in one direction or the other; others subjects explained the problem more implicitly as an unelaborated 'power struggle', or a change from a normal communication system to a 'propaganda strategy'; they accused Correa's government of 'persecuting' journalists, highlighted Correa's need to challenge media ("to break the media siege", in one literal expression) to implement economic changes, underscored media abusive practices of "media lynching", or, finally, framed the clash as a 'political dispute' connected to historical changes in the public sphere.

Finally, a very interesting finding was that mentions of *Enlace Ciudadano* or the *Sabatinas*, as Rafael Correa's weekly shows were known among the Ecuadoreans, came up very often in the elaboration of many responses (ten participants use them to support their answer) providing a strong idea of how embedded that medium was in the conception of a clash between the government and the media and how, probably, it contributed to the most symbolic dimension of the struggle. Let's recall that for Bourdieu, 'symbolic capital' (that is to say, the prestige, eroded or not, that Ecuadorean mainstream media represented) is inherently linked to 'economic capital' (2007, 2013), constituting, so to speak, the other side

of the same coin, and it deals, mostly, with representations and performativity (2013, pp. 296-297). Following an elastic and critical ‘Bourdieuian’⁹⁴ approach, *Enlace Ciudadano*, as we will discuss at length in the following chapter, was perceived as a direct challenge to mainstream media’s symbolic domination, constituting an alternative symbolic order, *representing* Correa’s government’s fight to change ‘materially’ media’s political economy. *Enlace*’s transgressive nature thus played a crucial role in the clash, and as such it is not a coincidence that it emerged so often spontaneously, without responding to a direct question, in the subjects’ discourses.

Interestingly, three respondents, all of them very involved in Correa’s rise as a political figure, (Carlos Ochoa, Orlando Pérez and José Alonso, all of them politicians or political advisers) claimed that Correa was always against the media and refused, at first, to

⁹⁴ As it is perfectly known among sociology scholars (Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone, eds., 1993), Bourdieu’s complex system, made basically around three key concepts (capital, habitus and field), may be very powerful to discuss reproduction in developed countries and hostile to debate on social innovation. Riley (2017) and Burawoy (2018) have discussed many of Bourdieu’s limits and potentialities, particularly around the question of class, stratification and social change. This study subscribes those doubts without denying Bourdieu’s mighty conceptual apparatus to analyze contemporary societies. In this part of our analysis, two connected (or, at least, not clearly differentiated) concepts happened to be useful to understand *Enlace Ciudadano*’s impact on the Ecuadorean society, *symbolic capital* and *symbolic domination*. Here they play an interchangeable role. Since *Enlace* presents a sort of different way (and a distinct representation and performance) of communicating the agenda, it would present, on the one hand, a challenge to mainstream media symbolic capital within what could be considered as the ‘journalistic field’ (Champagne, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996) in which *Enlace* and mainstream media would compete. Additionally, though, Correa’s populist show would present a defiance to the social symbolic domination produced by the media, given the pervasiveness of the journalistic field or its ‘metacharacter’ nature, influencing the functioning and composition of other fields in many other spheres, such as education, the economy, arts, or politics. This last aspect has been more developed by Couldry (2003), who rejects the use of journalistic field as a concept, and focus on capital, positing the existence of a ‘meta-capital of media’ which would be critical to understand how contemporary symbolic domination works. The main problem in Couldry’s conceptualization (endorsing here some of his criticism around the viability of a journalistic field to understand media’s influence in contemporary societies) is that ‘media power’, which is central in his analysis, is vaguely defined, dimensioned and historically situated. In other words, Couldry’s ‘media’s meta-capital’ risks to do what other vaguely structured mediatization theories do; that is to say, to analyze contemporary media following a sort of eschatological approach situating media at the center of societies without carefully detailing the context, conditions and possible pathways of this allegedly new and powerful overarching logic.

acknowledge Correa's good relations with media before becoming president. Only when the question was resumed providing evidence of Correa's cordial terms with mainstream media during the presidential election, did the participants agree that the press supported Correa mostly due to his good audience ratings and the personal hostility between one of the owners of a specific television broadcaster (Ecuavisa) and the other presidential candidate (Álvaro Noboa). Only one subject responded with an answer alien to any of the other participants' remarks. This journalist highlighted the role of the 2010 attempted coup in the clash. I had to ignore this answer firstly due to its isolation (not having any resonance with others' participants comments) and, secondly, due to its contradiction regarding dates explaining the clash: in September 2010, when the attempted coup happened, all public broadcasters and seized media were already functioning and controlled by the government, but as we observed in the historical progression of the clash, 30-S (and what happened afterwards) was a moment of total domestic media war, and it may seem peculiar that such an important date had been mentioned by only one of the subjects.

2.1.- The transversal discourse: communication as a power struggle

It is very important to note that there was only one discourse that clearly cut across distinct ideological and sectorial lines, and this was a view expressed by nouns such as 'control', 'dominance', 'imposition' or 'scrutiny'; all of them terms close to an idea of power. I will call this discourse 'struggle over communication' and it was evenly distributed among the subjects, although the 'direction' of that power changed depending on the subjects' ideology or positionality. This discourse hardly ever emerged isolated, or as the

only cause of the clash. For instance, in this excerpt the shadow of Rafael Correa's strong personality is also very present:

I think that he [Correa] also started from the beginning like underlining media's role a lot. I think that it was a strategy he was creating, making the media as the enemy. He launched his Saturday's shows [*Enlaces*]. . . So, one realized that this is not an outburst, but this is a state policy. . . And I think [this is because] they realized they wouldn't be able to control (the press). Ten years later there are very proud people, me among those, who [claim] that he couldn't run over us. He couldn't control us. (Journalist, private media)

Here, a senior journalist, with years of experience in one of the most important newspapers of the country, pointed out an explicit 'control' issue, a struggle over what (and how, and why, where and by whom) is communicated, seemingly on a number of issues concerning the government. Rafael Correa is always present, of course, being the 'he' of the paragraph, or the subject of all these actions or strategies of control. *Enlace Ciudadano* is also mentioned, disdainfully, as "his Saturday's shows".

Other participants performed the same discourse but situated in a very different angle. This time the one controlling and imposing was not the government or Correa, but mainstream media:

Media always liked to get their hands on. It took no more than three months, mostly when Correa started with his *Sabatinas*. And there he sets out other views about many issues. . . And there they start to get away. . . Media are fed by the government; they have tariff preferences to import print machines, ink, paper... This is the daily part; another issue is that they didn't pay any taxes. . .

-And why does Correa attack the media, rises their taxes, etc.?

Because the media began to get their hands on the government. . .

-Do you mean to control the government?

Exactly. And Correa says no, I don't rule like that. (Journalist, public media)

This excerpt belongs to the interview with a senior photojournalist, who had worked for private media and government agencies, and as it can be seen here, the 'control' issue now switched sides. From a government-political leader accused of controlling the media, we turn to a media eager to "get their hands on" the government. This photojournalist's discourse, at the time of the interview very sympathetic towards Correa and his policies, also put *Enlace* on the center of the discussion, although from a different perspective, favoring the symbolic challenge posited by Correa as a media producer and charismatic political figure. Finally, this view is mixed with another frequent discourse around the issue, the 'political economy' perspective, which would be examined further in the next section.

About ways in which subjects introduced more implicitly issues around control or imposition, expressions such as 'political struggle' were frequent, framing the problem as a matter of power and propaganda. For instance, Ivonne Gaibor, one of the editors of *Expreso*, a private newspaper very critical towards Correa's government, merged personalization issues and a sort of 'pure' power dynamics at the center of the clash:

I think it was Correa himself, either he allowed his real personality to emerge, or he realized the power he could have, even limiting the power of the press. To me it was a power game between the media and the elected president. When he was a candidate, he needed the media, once he was the president, he made them his favorite enemy. In my opinion, it was a power issue, and Correa ended up winning. (Ivonne Gaibor, *Expreso*).

David Chávez, a leftist sociologist and analyst, hosted very frequently in media talk shows, understood this power struggle in more theoretical, abstract terms:

Very soon he (Correa) realizes and sees the necessity to challenge media, that the media are going to be his opponent. I think he reads very well, or maybe he just guesses –and this is something that is also happening in the United States, although with other core features–, that as the political representation is in decay, the media field supersedes the public sphere of political parties, etc. You know, we move from the classic concept of public sphere towards a media sphere. . . Correa guesses very well, and there is where the political dispute takes place.

So, in Chávez’s analysis what happened was that the traditional political parties’ competition metamorphosed into a media conflict, suggesting an argument where both populism and the media were part of a same process, as if the whole political process was turned into a television studio or a social media feed. One minute later, connected to his explanation, Chávez also recalled *Enlace*’s key role in this power struggle and the representation of ideologies and interests (class positions in his analysis) behind the clash.

Other participants used other manners and expressions to elaborate that discourse of a struggle on communication. Mauricio Alarcón, a spokesman of Fundamedios, one of the most active non-governmental organizations supporting journalism in Ecuador, very critical towards Correa, underlined stigmatizing expressions, rejection or propaganda, weeks after the new government assumed power:

Let’s recall that when Rafael Correa assumes the power, he declares openly this war and that journalists and the media are the major enemies of that revolutionary process behind him. A few weeks after assuming the presidency he began with stigmatizing expressions which weren’t frequent in Ecuador, contemptuously calling journalists ‘horrific chubby’, ‘ink sicario’. . . and he started to change to this communication regime of the last years, which in my opinion is not a communication regime but a propaganda apparatus. (Mauricio Alarcón, Fundamedios)

Seconds later in the conversation, Alarcón referred directly to the *Sabatinas*, “like a tool for persecution, harassment, stigmatization and appeal to the population to go after journalists, organizations, activists”, bringing in this time, a clearly negative view from a perspective that is sharply supporting mainstream media and the Ecuador’s media system *ancient regime*, so to speak. Alarcón’s timing situating the clash right in the beginning of Correa’s presidency is not fully correct, at least if we observe the succession of events. Possibly Fundamedios’ spokesperson wanted to emphasize the logical hostility between Correa’s government and the media almost ‘by design’, and not by a collection of conflictive encounters and contradicted interests. However, I believe that this view can also be incorporated to that broader discourse of ‘struggle over communication’ shared by a number of differentiated subjects. It is interesting to see, on the other hand, how evenly distributed was this perspective: ten subjects very critical towards Correa (seven of them journalists working for private media) and eight individuals closer to President Correa’s position (five of them journalists working for public media) understood the clash in those terms. Another interesting finding is the correlation between mentions to the *Sabatina* or *Enlace Ciudadano* with the birth of this discourse of ‘struggle over communication’, or as another of the interviewees put it, “the fight for the narrative” and this adds more reasons to think about the *Sabatinas*’ high symbolic capital directly confrontational towards mainstream media’s status quo or established representation as reality and truth carriers in the Ecuadorean public sphere.

2.2.- Competing sides: Political economy, personalization and corruption

Of the other three prevalent discourses, two of them were evenly distributed, depending on the subject position, and the third presented a weaker crystallization. The first one was what I call a ‘political economy’ discourse or a ‘conflict of interests’ discourse, totally dominated by Correa’s supporters, save one case (nine individuals in total), and the second, a ‘personalization’ discourse directly blaming Correa for the clash (eight individuals), totally dominated by Correa’s detractors, except for two cases. Thirdly, five individuals, all of them journalists working for private media opposed to Correa, correlated news of corruption plots to the clash between the government and the media.

The ‘personalization’ discourse tended to appear associated with anger against Correa, an excessive and difficult actor who to many of these subjects was the main cause of the clash as well as of many other problems of the country. Alberto Acosta, a renowned progressive economist and one of the most popular Correa allies in the early days, elaborated perfectly that discourse around Correa as the epicenter of all those problems:

I think that the relationship breaks when he arrives to the presidency. He arrives and there’s one of those *Sabatinas*, one of the firsts when he invites communicators and journalists very often critical. . . And so, he gets upset and expels the journalists. And already, since then, it was impossible. I was one of his ministers at that time and I complained. . . But of course, he had another vision, he wanted to control everything, and he was turning into the great *caudillo*. And he was the holder of people’s political will. . . He is the only one who knows the country’s problems. . . he is the only one who knows the popular feeling, and he is the only one with answers and of course he is the only one who can make real those answers. Correa is a *caudillo* in the whole meaning of this word (Alberto Acosta)

As we can see, Acosta personalized the problem, tellingly, even using the famous *caudillo*, an almost stereotypical term used to understand the region's political history⁹⁵. He also mentioned the unavoidable *Sabatina*, probably the one featuring Emilio Palacio's fight, to illustrate the clash in personal terms. 'Control', by the way, is also introduced as a category associated to the clash, classifying Acosta's discourse as a mix between a dominant 'personalization' discourse alongside with a 'struggle on communication' discourse. There are also clear traits in this discourse of what Conaghan calls 'delegative democracy' (2016), that is to say, a problematic manner of understanding democracy and popular sovereignty by which the populist leader claims to represent fully the people's will, denying democratic legitimacy to those opposed to him. The Ecuadorean economist, a progressive person but extremely distanced from anything related to Correa, was accompanied by views of journalists closer to more conservative press, such as Luis Vivanco, editor of *La Posta*:

I think there are two things. First, this is a personal matter, psychological, about his frustration regarding media, because in his first years he wouldn't stop talking about how one newspaper, *El Universo*, had not published a story when he was student; this might be an anecdote. . . but for him it was traumatic. . . He encountered a country with its politics dismantled. . . but there was a media structure and media credibility, and so that was the only enemy left for him to defeat. . . It was the last bastion of a counter-power that he couldn't stand. . . It was the last crack of scrutiny in the country (Luis Vivanco, *La Posta*)

In Vivanco's words there was a personal and psychological aspect, first, and next again (as happened with Acosta), a discourse around the struggle between competing

⁹⁵ Let's just recall that one of the first American essays on Ecuadorean political history, already explored in this study in the history-centered chapter 1, was George I. Blancksten's *Ecuador: Constitutions and Caudillos*, published in 1951.

powers. Some seconds further, Vivanco added the necessity to cover alleged corruption plots as another of Correa's motivations to control media. However, this personalization perspective was not only owned by fierce anti-Correa participants, although most of those performing this discourse were clear detractors; there were exceptions highlighting a particularly interesting dimension of this discourse, which seemed a positive view of a polarizing but strong leader, a leader who acts, who decides:

The relationship changes because ex-President Correa proposes that communication must be addressed as a public service. . . This caused problems in the relations with media. And it caused problems because the media were always used to being the fifth power (sic) and without any type of regulation above them. . .

-That relationship changed, yes, but how was it changed?

It was quite tense, and this added to the fact that ex-President Correa's figure was always a figure that engenders sympathies and antipathies.

-Polarizing?

Polarizing. He has part of the population on his side, but also part of the population is opposed to him. But it is mostly because that figure, that image... because he creates that controversial figure and he intervenes and exercises the political power and he says no, "the media have also to be subject to scrutiny", and there it starts the rupture with the media (Journalist, public media)

This journalist employed at *El Telégrafo*, the state-owned newspaper, explained the clash in terms of a 'struggle over communication' or the competition between powers, but he also added that fascinating approach about a strong and determined leadership that fits in the 'personalization' discourse but with a different understanding of what that personal factor was or the processes it triggered.

On the other hand, many participants closer to Correa's stances articulated a 'political economy' discourse, showing basically that the clash was produced due to government and

media's divergent economic and institutional interests. Here most of the interviewees pointed out to media's opposition to Correa's economic policies as the main factor causing the rupture of relations. As happened with other discourses, these views emerged together with another discourse, in this case alongside the hegemonic 'struggle over communication' perspective. For instance, Raquel Escobar, a leftist journalist working for the public radio and critical in some respects with Correa's government, underlined the "economic model" as the main factor to understand the clash:

In all this time the answer was that since he is in power, he has a very clear leftist stance . . . a critical stance toward the media. After six months (in power), and I was working in the government at that time, the media started to attack a lot the economic model that Correa proposed. And there's when the rupture began. It's then when Correa begins to attack the media as a political response to impose an economic and a political model. (Raquel Escobar, Radio Publica)

In the full elaboration of the response, Escobar rejected that the media were defending a "democratic model"; they were against Correa's plan to create a strong state, "after 25 years of a weak neoliberal state, which interested to the media". To sum up, this journalist, performing 'conflict of interest' and 'struggle on communication' discourses, was not only adding the problem of opposing views around the economic model, but highlighting Correa's answer to that challenge 'imposing' a model. It is important to notice here that basically all public media journalists, analysts or policymakers close to Correa and some journalists working for private media acknowledged the power behind the media and rejected, explicitly or implicitly, an understanding of media as a neutral actor. Mostly, on

the contrary, for them private media seem, very often, the agents or representatives of the traditional ruling class and its interests.

However, other participants presented more specific interests behind the clash; traditional institutional privileges, according to Ricardo Zambrano, journalist in *El Universo* were at stake:

There are two things. They (the media) thought they were positioning their candidate too. . . but when the media began to ask for things, Correa drove them all out. I'm not talking about contracts or scams, but about institutional advertisement; the media are quite fed by government advertising. . . So, later when media commenced to publish things that Correa didn't like, Correa started to get away and not only that, but he also started to criticize the press. The relationship began to wear out reciprocally. Correa started to implement a communication system in his government, each department had its own communication and didn't attend to traditional media. . . (Ricardo Zambrano, *El Universo*)

El Universo's reporter was using a more specific 'conflict of interest' discourse than Escobar, although both shared the view of a struggle around communication between the government and the media. Further on, Zambrano explained that at the beginning many reporters believed in Correa's promises, just to realize some months after the leader came to power, that he was just "another similar politician", rejecting the press' "criticizing role". Next, the Guayaquil reporter recalled some corruption plots allegedly masked by Correa's policies against the media.

Corruption, actually, emerged in six responses from the participants as a factor behind the clash, in two of them as the only cause. Arturo Torres, at the time of the interview *El Comercio's* editor-in-chief, underscored a specific corruption case as the turning point explaining the rupture between Correa's government and the media:

Once (Correa) is in power he faces his first corruption scandal related to the FARC. . . We start publishing that, all the public official's proximity with the FARC, and that hits him because next it comes the Angostura attacks, where Raúl Reyes and the FARC were in Ecuadorian territory. . . There is when the (honeymoon between Correa and the media) breaks, and he start seeing media as his enemies. (Arturo Torres, *El Comercio*).

To Torres' thesis about the FARC⁹⁶, Andersson Boscan and Juan Carlos Calderon added newspaper *Expreso's* series of stories published in 2009 about Correa's older brother relations and contracts with the government, or the *Gran Hermano* case, (the book would be published in 2010) which was mentioned above. Juan Carlos Aizprua, anchor at Ecuavisa, for his part, claimed that the 'narcovalija' ('narco-suitcase') case was key to trigger the clash. Zambrano mentioned the 'checks case' ('caso cheques') as an important factor to understand the rupture, and Luis Vivanco talked about corruption cases in general behind Correa's frustration and his desire to control the media.

Summing up, the key question about why Correa's government and the media clashed seems to be answered by the people who experienced the process as a complex but quite consistent set of discourses, most of them connected by a dominant view of a struggle, a fight between powers for control, imposition or scrutiny, with opposed sides and distinct rationalizations. I've tried to illustrate this particular structure and typology in the figure below:

⁹⁶ Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC, a major and historical guerrilla (almost a real army controlling a lot of Colombian territory) and political actor in Colombian politics, acted in regions closed to Colombia and Ecuador borders in the Amazon. The attacks on FARC positions close to the Ecuadorean border took place in March 2008 causing the death of Raúl Reyes, one of the FARC's leaders. According to some sources (Colombian government, Reyes' computer, etc.) there were ties between the FARC and Correa, but those accusations took place mostly in 2009. See more at: <https://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/07/30/ecuador.farc.ties/> or <https://www.reuters.com/article/ecuador-wsj/ecuadors-correa-says-will-sue-wsj-over-farc-story-idUSN2551771320090625>

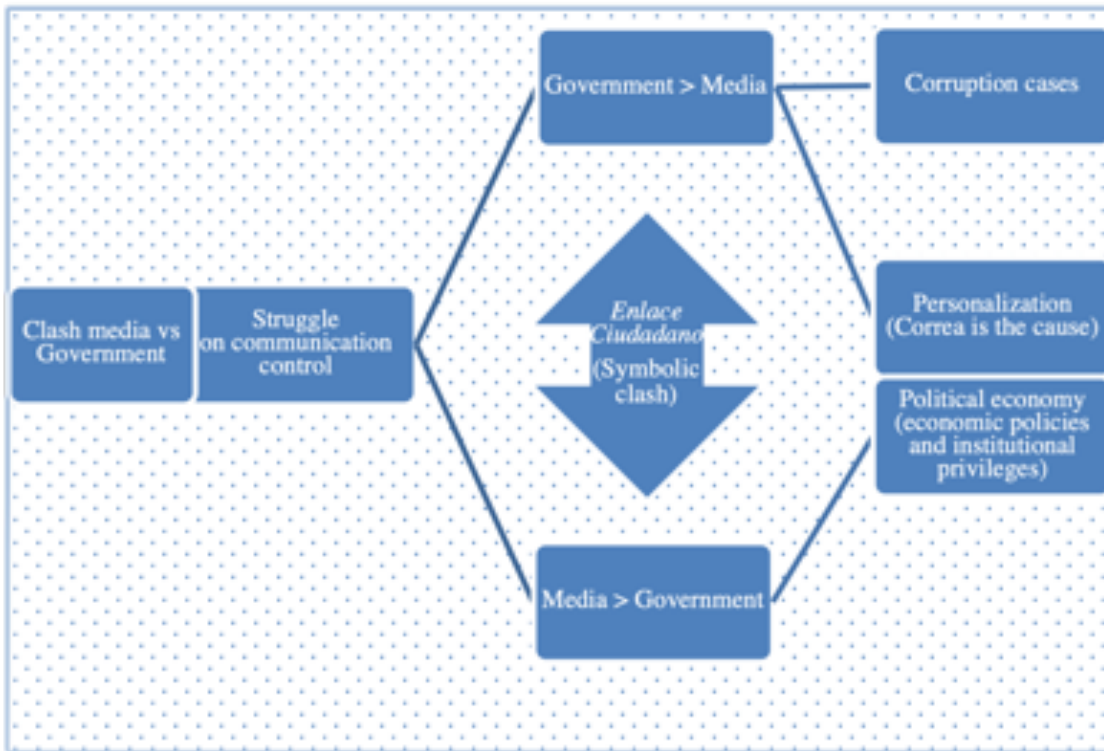


Figure 2.1: Discourses on the clash between Correa’s government and media.

How these discourses speak about the assumption of power of a populist leader and the progressive deterioration of the relations between Correa’s government seem quite intelligible. It was a problem of communication control, triggered by changes in the political economy (internal to mainstream media and connected to the interest represented by private media), and by Correa’s excessive charismatic/authoritarian leadership, with a symbolic space of struggle that was outstandingly depicted, quite literally, by *Enlace Ciudadano*, Correa’s populist show, which would be analyzed in the following chapter, and which emerged constantly associated with the clash. These conclusions also provide clues to a deeper understanding of how a populist actor turned the mainstream media into the ‘enemy

of the people' and perhaps, more importantly, how this process should be approached *as a mutual conflict triggered by both sides* where a charismatic aspect could have a role but mostly once it was 'mediatized' through a show, *Enlace Ciudadano*. It was, moreover, not a project planned or designed *ex officio* or from one side of the struggle, but the result of a convoluted struggle to control the conditions of the narrative, symbolically and materially.

These underlying factors finally can explain what happened behind the successive cases, important dates, political and legal actions, and bold international affairs commented in the first section of this chapter. It was a fight to control the agenda structured by the opposition between media's direct or indirect economic and institutional interests and the new government political goals, and by the opposition of an actor that challenged traditional media's status, established prestige or symbolic domination. It was then a clash explained by a double opposition, material or economic-political and authoritative or symbolic. Of course, the nature of those oppositions is marked by Correa's populism and the specific political project he embodied, but not only. The way the Ecuadorean media behave also adds important features to the clash, as so the institutional background in which the struggle was set. In the following discussion section, we will try to bring more light on how this process speaks about the relations between media and a populist leader, now president of the country.

3.- Discussion: The joint path towards an unstable media populist regime

In this chapter we have examined what appeared to be a process of increasing conflict between two alleged distinct and opposed logics, mainstream media, and an incumbent populist leader. This is, at least, a very common narrative about the clash between populism

and the press: their values, ideas and goals are intrinsically opposed, so their struggles happen to be the matter of two antithetical objects colliding. For instance, according to Kellam and Stein (2016) the new populist actors in Latin America emerged in contexts of almost dislocated local party systems, and media happened to play the role of the political opposition to the populists; the new leftist leaders (such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Cristina Fernández or Rafael Correa), on their part “opposed to the dominant ideological leaning of the media establishment”, found in the press the perfect enemy to “sustain the enthusiasm of their base” (2016, 50). This explanation, situated in the Latin American context, has echoes in other authors that see populism as basically opposed to the free and plural press, and mostly “interested in cultivating the media as a partisan instrument and weakening inclusive, progressive, critical media spheres” (Waisbord, 2018: 26). Populism, in sum, since it seeks a direct communication with the people and performs an anti-elitist rhetoric (Aalberg et al, 2017; Block & Negrine, 2017; Engesser et al, 2017; De Vreese et al, 2018; Sorensen, 2018), appears to be almost naturally hostile to independent and critical media. However, what we have examined in this chapter, and what had been observed in the previous sections didn’t fit so harmoniously in those narratives.

First, before assuming power, Correa, the populist candidate who performed a clearly populist campaign, had good relations with a number of televisions, radios and journalists who in turn developed a full media populist momentum with a clear representation crisis as a background. It seemed that it was Correa’s new position, as incumbent president, that created, at least, the *condictio sine qua non* for the clash to occur and not his qualification as a populist leader. However, this is not always the case with many populist actors, who get

negative coverage, at least from a significant part of the media system; this phenomenon has been very well studied especially in the European context where populist actors tend to be right-wing or ethno-nationalist and receive usually mainstream media hostile coverage (Wettstein et al, 2018)⁹⁷. Anyhow, this mainstream negative coverage didn't occur to Correa during the 2006 election, but mostly the opposite. Rather, the tension between mainstream media and Correa deteriorated progressively; there wasn't any mention of media policy in the electoral program in 2006, and even if these issues appeared to be more relevant in the 2009 electoral program, it was mostly after the 2013 elections that Correa's aggressive media policy would be fully implemented. Something similar could be said about the creation of new public media or the intervention of Isaias' group: these decisions were adopted step by step without a pre-established plan. It can even be claimed that many political decisions affecting the government's relations with media happened to be *ad hoc* situations, including the seizure of Isaias media conglomerate (whose debt with the state predated Correa's administration and was celebrated by many beyond *oficialismo* circles), *El Telégrafo's* nationalization, the usage of 'cadenas nacionales' (including the long interruption for 30-S), partial reforms of Conartel (linked very likely to the context of the governmental war against Teleamazonas), Correa's suits or the opportunity to offer asylum to Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, contradicting the narrative promoted by mainstream media of an authoritarian leader persecuting press freedom and obstructing government's transparency. As matter of fact, *Enlace Ciudadano*, the most populist media created by the Correa government on which the next chapter is more centered, was not born focused on attacking

⁹⁷ However, something different could be said about negative or reluctant coverage of left-wing populism in Spain, Portugal and Ireland (Salgado et al, 2021; Sánchez-Gutiérrez and Nogales, 2018).

the mainstream media or “the corrupt press”; it was part of a process that took years, reflecting key and dramatic moments.

But in addition to that problem of looking at complex phenomena with claims of antithetical logics, many approaches start with the assumption that it is populism that is clashing with media and not the other way around, presuming that the media acted as a neutral or almost apolitical institution. And this can be problematic. Many authors assume as a simple fact or as self-evidence that media are independent and professional, maybe supporting a concrete ideology but respectful to certain journalistic norms and practices, and it is the emerging populist actor who is seeking their control to achieve or to protect his/her goals. However, in this presumption the researcher is assuming that media in Ecuador (or, in any case, in any country or region) is independent almost naturally, without considering the context and specific factors that make media to be more or less neutral (or not blatantly biased), independent and professional. Historically speaking, objective journalism appeared and developed in the United States under precise circumstances (Schudson, 2001; Pickard, 2014), and something similar can be said about Western Europe, where journalism and media were integral part of the social-democrat consensus after the Second World War (van Cuilenburg and McQuail 2003). American and European journalism, in short, were transformed under specific political, economic, and cultural factors into what independent media happened to be and weren't born independent or professional when the first newspapers appeared in the Nineteenth century, many times performing as partisan bullhorns or paper representatives of the particular interest of their owner. Nevertheless, this assumption seems to be the dominant frame, at least, in the minds of many of the observers

of international organizations such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, and also, perhaps, in the inclinations of many journalists working for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *El País* or *Der Spiegel*.

As we mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, Albuquerque calls this position played by the media in the Brazilian case, in many aspects similar to the Ecuadorean context, as a *Poder Moderador* role (2005). Defined as an “outside force. . . necessary to correct. . . possible imbalances and to conciliate the actions of the three traditional branches (executive, legislative and judiciary)” (487), Albuquerque uses this concept, inspired in the role of pre-democratic ‘constitutional monarchies’⁹⁸ (where the king performs a ‘moderating’ role), to explain the peculiar adaptation of the ‘fourth branch’ (or watchdog) American model in the Brazilian context. Albuquerque claims that Brazilian media, in contrast to the American where the press assumes an ‘objective’ role, takes an active part in a political process that cannot be left to be driven by the democratic forces by themselves. Something similar happened in Ecuador, at least in media’s active position regarding the political process. For example, many of the cases raised against Correa by the alleged ‘independent’ press had a clear political intention and in many instances they couldn’t have passed the filter of

⁹⁸ To clarify this point it is important to draw a clear distinction between constitutional and parliamentary monarchies. The latter only play a symbolic role (the king or queen performs as the embodiment of the nation or the cultural community, signs-up laws, takes part in national or religious rituals, etc.), whereas the former play an active role in politics, vetoing laws or selecting members of the government. Constitutional monarchies proliferated in Europe in the Nineteenth century, transitioning gradually into more democratic forms of government in the Twentieth century, although there still exist some nations today with that type of non-democratic governments, such as Morocco or Thailand. Examples of parliamentary monarchies today would be the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands or Sweden; Spain, the only parliamentary monarchy that is recognized as such in a constitution, is a rare example of a recent restoration in a European pattern where monarchies transited towards democracy in the last third of the Nineteenth century or were replaced by republican regimes throughout the first half of the Twentieth century. Empire of Brazil’s monarchy during the Nineteenth century, eminently interventionist and undemocratic, was the original *Poder Moderador* that Albuquerque recycles to understand media’s political role in contemporary Brazil.

professional newspapers or broadcast media; let's recall the purported falsification of the Constitutional text based on a confusing audio in which Correa and a representative talk about some provisions for the election of provincial parliaments; it is, at least, very bold to extract accusations of fraud from that evidence. Something analogous happened in other cases, such as the famous *Gran Hermano* book about which some journalists⁹⁹ in Ecuador claimed that no clear conclusions could be supported with the evidence there presented, or the alleged electoral falsification in Guayaquil widely reported by Teleamazonas.

Keeping in mind all these aspects, the chronological process, and the context of the clash, I believe that possibly the model that may work better to understand the clash is not a model contrasting an emerging populist actor at odds with an independent and critical press. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, the Ecuadorean press was far from being strongly 'independent' and professional before Correa came to power. Rather, the angle to be utilized to understand the clash between populism and the media in the Ecuadorean case (and possibly in many more cases) must be dynamic and settled in inconclusive logics and fragile institutional settings, in which the political and media fields, so to speak, are not clearly differentiated or delimited functioning following abstract and consensual norms. In other words, as it was advanced in the introduction, the populist leader and the media are here co-dependent in how the process unfolded; the two worlds produce the situation together by their conflictive association. The clash emerged because media's *status quo* (besides other

⁹⁹ This is the case of Giovana Tassi (who shared the newsroom with Juan Carlos Calderón in *Hoy* newspaper), David Chávez and Orlando Pérez, all of them friendly to Correa's stances when interviewed. However, despite their political allegiance (very critical about Correa in Tassi's case) it is significant that in 2020 with Correa in exile and the state attorney so interested in bringing the former president to justice, none of the cases mentioned in this chapter were considered, including the alleged collusion between Correa's government and the president's older brother.

interests represented by media), was being challenged by a new political actor that decided to change first the political system (drafting a new Constitution) and consecutively media's interests on the political economy. To this new situation, media reacted politically, acting more and more explicitly as political actors; Carlos Vera's case, displaying the transformation of a mainstream television anchor into a political candidate running against Correa, may illustrate this point. Another important dimension that defined the clash was the tremor that Correa himself as a political performing actor created for the symbolic domination traditionally produced by mainstream media. In the following chapter we will see how media reform and the creation and expansion of *Enlace Ciudadano*, worked as two veritable sides of the coin, presenting a material or economic change (media reform) and a symbolic challenge (Correa's populist show) to the Ecuadorean mainstream media.

In the field thus, Ecuadorean journalists and policy actors witnessed and participated in a power struggle over communication control over who set the agenda or who decided about what the national (or even regional or global) debate should be about. Of course, this doesn't presuppose a sort of flipping strategy, where the populist actor was right and mainstream media were wrong, but mostly the recognition of two competing interests within the background of a strong institutional crisis that produced blurring limits between politics and news media. The subjects interviewed also spoke about the nature of those problems; for some, media were tools of the oligarchy to block Correa's economic model; for others, it was all about Correa indeed, the narcissism of a person who thought of himself as a sort of Messiah, or, rather, as a *Libertador*. Elaborating more on the blurring limits between institutions and action areas, Correa's logic, as a populist president, clashing with the media,

was possibly facilitated precisely due to the lack of independence of the Ecuadorean mainstream media, and the sharp political goal of his media opponents. Also, to the not fully professional or plural press, the new president happened to act, many times, with a hierarchical, egocentric, excessive, perspective not at all sensible to criticism, that helped private media to energize their camp and, in turn, blurred the norms associated with political leadership's respect towards state and social institutions. It was then a problem of limits, undefined spheres and clearly dysfunctional institutions. In other words, neither did media function as independent institutions doing their work, nor did the president perform following the basic formal roles regarding other social institutions. This structural instability facilitated the clash, the creation of the alleged authoritarian illiberal leadership fighting the presumed 'corrupt media', an 'enemy of the people', and created the conditions for the odd joint work of media and populism, functioning as a co-dependent process.

Going back to a Bourdieusian approach and in particular to Couldry's (2003) interesting discussion on Bourdieu's theory of state power and media capital, in the Ecuadorean case neither the 'meta-capital of the state' (able to influence other fields and capitals throughout the social order), nor the 'meta-capital of the media' (also capable to shape the functioning of other fields) presented themselves as clearly differentiated or established under well delimited logics. Actually, if we assume that Correa eventually won the battle by creating, especially through 2013, a media populist regime with new laws and institutions, we may support that Correa, representing the 'meta-capital of the state', was able to tame the 'meta-capital of the media'; but he did by appropriating media's logics and practices and not just by censoring or controlling media, as we will see. On the opposite side,

private media possibly lost the battle because they were not properly or rightly representing the ‘meta-capital of the media’, playing the game as professional, independent and more or less neutral or ideologically honest media companies, but acting as political if not sensationalist or populist actors trying to influence directly in state policies and collective decisions. We will discuss more about these aspects in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

“Un nuevo estilo de gobierno”: *Enlace Ciudadano* and the institutional transformation

“(Enlace Ciudadano) started with the typical setup of the president (talking) to journalists. . . . But that format was changing, and building on the original concept, (I thought) we didn’t have to go through the journalist’s perspective: we had to reach the citizens directly. . . . On television you can show graphics and you can do it with the people sitting there, talking to the people and not to journalists. Next, we refined the concept of ‘I respond to you, I speak directly to you’. It was necessary to focus on some aesthetic work, since, even though the president was charismatic, with so many hours talking about subjects such as foreign policy, economy, mining, international issues, it could get boring, so we had to build segments to make those sections less boring. And there were segments such as ‘freedom of expression now belongs to all’, which was the opposite of what the media was saying, so when the media reported that they were attacked, I was contrasting what they published with our vision of the truth. Any media could have sued me, civil or criminal, it does not matter, if I broadcasted information that they considered harmful, but nobody did anything because we always worked with arguments and verified (our information) with real facts.” (Fernando Alvarado, interview September 13th, 2018)

Direct communication with the people, not responding to journalists, but to the citizens. A great deal of this extract from a long interview with Fernando Alvarado, Ecuador’s National Communications Secretary from 2009 to 2015 and for many, Rafael Correa’s right hand in communication and media issues, shows a clear example of what many authors define as populist political communication (Aalberg et al, 2017; Block & Negrine, 2017; Engesser et al, 2017; De Vreese et al, 2018; Sorensen, 2018). We could even classify Alvarado’s response as a classic ‘anti-elitist populist communication’, with “references and appeals to the people and anti-elitism” (Aalberg et al, 2017); furthermore, some evidence would depict the Ecuadorean case as ‘complete populism’ (ibidem), adding

up to the above mentioned features, the rejection of specific out-groups, present in many of Correa's speeches, once in power, with accusations to the 'corrupt press', the 'infantile left' or the so-called 'pelucones'¹⁰⁰, a comical representation of the economic elites that Correa profusely reproduced in his media appearances. Thus, essential elements of populist communication are present there and we already highlighted in the previous chapter how this specific show emerged in subjects' discussions about the clash between Correa's government and the private media; we even borrowed Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and symbolic domination to understand why *Enlace* was so pervasive and associated with arguments about Correa-media conflict. In this sense, *Enlace* was clearly defying media's symbolic capital and domination by challenging their reputation and prestige. However, Alvarado is introducing here more arguments surrounding this type of communication than just the appeal to the people. There is the goal of avoiding the press, but an aesthetic or sensationalist objective is also mentioned; and Alvarado brings attention to journalistic practices and freedom of expression. Carefully read and analyzed, this fragment is far from the simplistic or crude Manichean thinking highlighted in many public discussions and scholarly research about populism.

Alvarado is talking about a reality that took place fully from 2009 and 2010 until Correa left office in 2017; Alvarado's fragment defines an incumbent populist leader, and not just the brilliant populist candidate who emerged in the 2005-2006 biennium. This chapter, also conceived in a chronological order starting right after Correa came to power in

¹⁰⁰ From 'peluca' (wig) in Spanish. It is an expression commonly used by Correa to address the upper-middle class contemptuously, echoing the decadent aristocracy (who used wigs on their heads, in contrast to the masses) opposed to the French Revolution.

the first months of 2007, will discuss thus the construction of that ‘ruling’ populist communication, which since 2013 would form an established populist media regime in clear contrast with the Ecuadorean media system that Correa encountered when he was elected. That creation was expressed by two broad processes: one more focused on the symbolic, performative and communicative side, and another more centered on the legal-institutional system and political economy of the media; one interpreted by a populist show, *Enlace Ciudadano*, and by Rafael Correa himself, the showman and media savvy charismatic president, and another presented by a complex legal and institutional process conveyed by a number of important policies, challenging and changing the media’s position in the country. However, we also will see how this new media environment was not exactly a new system of governance totally opposed to mainstream media and journalism’s core values; it was, on the contrary, a plan that adopted many of journalism’s main practices and values to defy the traditional relations between politics and the media in the Andean nation. Populist communication and populism’s interaction with media, the following pages explain, in agreement with what we conclude in the previous sections about the clash between Correa and the mainstream media, is far from being a naked clash of two clearly opposed logics.

In this chapter, in summary, we will look at this intense regime change through two distinct but connected sides of the same process. First, we will examine the origins and development of *Enlace Ciudadano*, the weekly show in which the now president would try to establish a direct ‘link’ with the Ecuadorean people. Secondly, we will observe the legal, institutional, and administrative media reform initiated during Correa’s long presidency, from the creation of the first public broadcaster to the discussions and legal innovations

triggered with the approval of the 2008 Constitution and the Communication Law of 2013. These two central components –*Enlace* as the major populist medium, and the legal-institutional change–, this study believes, embody perfectly how populism appeared in Ecuador once Correa came to power, and their accurate description and analysis are necessary to understand the interaction of populism with Ecuadorean journalism and news media. So to speak, if in the previous chapter we looked at the clash between the new government and the media as a succession of events, critical dates and correlated political decisions defined by the struggle for communication control in a sort of co-dependent process, now we will examine how that war was transformed into new laws, institutions and media (and performative) actions producing a media regime that was almost totally established by 2013. Finally, in the discussion section, a critical review of significant literature on populism’s relations with journalism and news media sets out a conversation about how nuanced and complex that interaction may be, contrasting the existing theories with the Ecuadorean case. As we will see, the relationship between central aspects of the mediatization process, such as professionalism and commercialism, and the relations they entail regarding politics and populism doesn’t fit models defined just by antagonistic interactions, subordinated associations (or arguments such as ‘media as an independent variable shapes politics as a dependent variable’) or a sort of serene exchange between populism and media’s features. Media-populism relations, on the contrary, emerge here mostly as a ‘conflictive symbiosis’ where media and political logics are meshed in an ongoing fight for the narrative. In this sense, this chapter, as the whole discussion behind the Ecuadorean case, challenges the usual understanding of the mediatization process as the rise

of a powerful media logic, owned or controlled by media institutions, ruling over other logics and fields, such as politics (Esser & Stromback, 2014; Mazzolenni & Schulz, 1999). In Ecuador it seemed the opposite, as if the media logic would be redesigned or reappropriated by the populist president to support his political project. Actually, some authors point to a “politicization of the media” (Cerbino et al, 2014) in the Ecuadorean case and this, in some respects, could have been the case. In this way, Correa’s Ecuador would prove more than the existence of a positive and causal relation between mediatization and populism; it is, on the contrary, the case of the rise of a shared existence where both logics thrive together in a ‘conflictive symbiosis’, ‘mediatizing’ populism and ‘populising’ the media.

1.- The purest populist medium: origins and development of *Enlace Ciudadano*

The first action regarding media decided by Rafael Correa as president was the creation of *Enlace Ciudadano* in January 2007¹⁰¹, two months after being elected. I believe that this chronological evidence is very meaningful and forces us to start the analysis of Ecuador’s media regime by exploring this specific media artifact, also known by most Ecuadoreans as *Sabatinas*¹⁰². As already commented on the previous chapter, *Enlace* constituted a major challenge to mainstream media’s symbolic capital and symbolic

¹⁰¹ Hundreds of *Enlace Ciudadano* clips and full videos are available on Youtube, posted by anonymous sources or by some institutions, such as the Republic’s Presidency or the National Secretary of Communication (Secom). I have used these resources to work on this section. It is interesting to note that *Enlaces* or *Sabatinas* were displayed by Secom and the Presidency in their main Youtube pages, at least until the beginning of 2018. They were stored there during my first fieldwork stay in 2017; however, they had disappeared in my second stay during the summer of 2018. In 2021 they were stored by *El Ciudadano* Youtube page. *El Ciudadano* is, according to Ecuador’s Presidency webpage, a product of the Secom, executed through the Secretary of Institutional Media.

¹⁰² A word about the etymological origin of the name *Sabatinas*. It has a Catholic origin, “the divine office of Saturday”, and also designates the “composed lesson [of several courses] of the whole week, that students used to perform on Saturday”, according to *Real Academia de la Lengua* dictionary.

domination, defined following a broad understanding of Bourdieu's theory (2007, 2013), as the prestige or reputation (and therefore credibility) of media to represent the existing social order; possibly together with other personalist and charismatic actions conveyed by Correa, *Enlace*, broadcasted every Saturday, disputed mainstream media's influence on the public agenda and very often attacked many journalists' prestige and alleged scoops against the government. An in-depth analysis of this artifact is thus indispensable to understand how populism interacted with media and journalism in the Ecuadorean case. I will use four specific shows to do that, two produced in 2007, one recorded in 2010 and one performed in 2017. I will focus on the evolution and changes undergone by the show; the interaction with mainstream media and its significance as a populist medium will be examined, commenting also on the limited available literature on the subject.

The first *Enlace* in 2007 was named *Dialogos con el Presidente*, a title which, at least, lasted until the first weeks of 2009. In the beginning, the gigs were moderately brief, lasting one hour although the ideological tone was already explicit. For instance, in his debut show, as can be seen in the footage, Correa announces, "a new style of ruling, where the president is available for his people, responding to any questions or concerns they have", and informs on his first international trip to Venezuela, Brazil and Peru, stressing the importance of regional integration, which was "not anymore just a dream, Bolivar's dream, but a necessity for survival; separated, they will crush us". In the show, Correa also argues against "the neoliberal globalization that make us consumers and not citizens". The reporters invited to the event, a formal gathering at Carondelet palace, the seat of the presidency in Quito, are journalists working for the radio Unidos por el Ecuador, a local business, not

owned by any of the major national media conglomerates. These first shows (as would happen to the rest of them in 2007) are divided in three sections: President's report on government's actions, Q&A session with journalists and a final segment focused on science and technology issues. Correa looks vividly shy in this first gig, a little sunken in his presidential chair: he doesn't grab the microphone and answers almost passively to the questions of the press; he doesn't seem proactive. However, he seems resolved in his own words to trigger a "real change", a "radical economic, political, social change".

In that same year, in May, Correa's weekly show would feature for the first time a clash with a member of the mainstream media which was already commented on in chapter 2. Emilio Palacio, opinion editor of *El Universo*, the Guayaquil newspaper, contested Correa about some events from the past, especially about relations of press with (Palacio uses that expression) "*la partidocracia*" and the role of media around the 1999 financial crisis. The discussion didn't come to a peaceful end. For many of the informants interviewed, this episode represented a turn of the events in the relationship between the government and the media. The encounter¹⁰³ starts with a calm Correa listening to an excited Palacio, who defends the media's position regarding the corruption of former governments and political parties, especially around the 1999 *Feriado Bancario* but also in general, defending the press' position versus the political system "in the last 25 years". Correa looks skeptical about Palacio's words; he cuts him off a few times to expose allegedly false claims made by Palacio, and to ask him to calm down as the journalist raises the tone of his voice. Some

¹⁰³ The clash' between Correa and Palacio that took place on May, 7, 2007, is available on YouTube in two separated clips: Video part 1 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GgUpz_ITa4&t=405s) and video part 2 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yANBg7fYIQE&t=19s>)

people in the audience, gathered for the show in the presidential palace, mock Palacio and his long and quite aggressive locution. In fact, the meeting, to which other journalists are invited, is monopolized by Palacio and Correa for more than 15 minutes. Correa begins to become agitated when Palacio accuses him of not having enough knowledge about the workings behind the laws and corrupt processes of *Feriado Bancario* in 1999. Correa even mentions that maybe he was busy working on his PhD, but he was more informed than most of the press of what was happening. Palacio insists on defending the press's role during those years, although acknowledging some wrongdoings. Correa keeps criticizing the media and the atmosphere becomes tenser; at some point, Correa reproaches that the press didn't denounce what was "the largest robbery in the century", as he defined *Feriado Bancario*. Palacio jumps from his seat and cries that that's lie, and the press did its job; Correa warns Palacio ("one more Emilio, and I'm going to say to security people to lead you out of the room"). Palacio doesn't stop talking and the Ecuadorean leader, calmly, asks Palacio to leave the room; some journalists head out of the palace in solidarity with Palacio, others stay until the meeting finishes, reacting to Correa's resolution with laughter and cheers.

Henceforth, Palacio would transform himself into one the most famous government enemies, as we discussed already in the previous chapter, but what is more interesting seems that in months after that clash, the *Sabatinas* would develop a more and more acute strategy of attacking and criticizing mainstream media. The staging of the show would change too. In 2008, Correa and his advisers would decide to expand *Enlace*, travelling with the show throughout the country (assembling crowded gatherings and celebrations in remote regions) and, later, to some cities abroad with meaningful Ecuadorean immigration (especially in

Spain, Italy and the United States). The setting would change also from a dialogue with a group of journalists divided in three sections at the presidential palace in front of some guests, to ever-increasing stages around the country and the world, without journalists on the scene, and more and more guests (reaching to thousands in some events), a sign language interpreter, and a highly produced content. The segment originally focused on science and technology would be transformed into a new section named “free speech for all” or “press freedom for all”. The show would expand its running time to two hours in 2008, and up to three hours and a half (or even more) from 2009 until the last *Sabatina* was broadcasted. It would be in that year when the program was renamed as *Enlace Ciudadano*. Correa himself would be metamorphosed progressively into a showman, always at the center of the performance, conducting the representation, introducing different segments, dancing, singing and joking with usual visitors or special guests, making pranks with people, amidst laughs, boos or ovations depending on the topic covered. The government’s ministers would start to participate in the show too, providing information about their respective activities. Some *Enlaces* would even be produced with hosts other than Correa, such as his vice-presidents, Lenin Moreno (2007-2013) and Jorge Glas (2013-2017) although their number and overall contribution are extremely limited. The *Sabatinas* were, beyond doubt, Rafael Correa’s almost personal show.

In October 2010, *Enlace Ciudadano*’s 200th edition was celebrated in Quito in the Plaza Grande, right in front of the presidential Palacio de Carondelet. What happened to be a special show, started with salsa musicians singing lyrics cheering the Revolution, and a singer performing catchy tunes in Kichwa. But it was not very different from other *Enlaces*

of that year and the following weekly programs. That edition lasted three hours and a half and was highly produced; by 2010, the *Sabatinas* presented the general features that the show displayed until the last gig in 2017. It featured at the beginning ordinary people celebrating the government's works or policies and recalled *Enlace's* scope around the world. Correa, of course, was at the center of the scene, but in a peculiar way. As shown in the video, he is close, he jokes, people laugh, he is politically incorrect (at some point in the show Correa introduces a book, written by himself, yelling to the people "I don't mind if you clone my book, the goal is that you read it!") and criticizes the *pelucones*, or the corrupt press, both recurrent themes. He also rejects bureaucracy ("What do they say that this can't be done because of this law or that other law? We are here to do things!), showing traits of a problematic 'delegative democracy', which, as Conaghan (2016) explains, understands democracy in a more plebiscitarian way, limiting horizontal checks and balances, and enforcing the vertical connection between the leader (and the executive power) and the people. After criticizing judicial inactivity, Correa performs long explanations on economic issues with detailed PowerPoint presentations. He also praises the Chinese ambassador and jokes with a Cuban minister present at the show about the low percentage of female representation in the Cuban government ("say this to Raul: we're winning on this!"). He also covers the problem with the justice system (labeled as inefficient and corrupt) and accuses some judges of being "fakers" and "pharisees". Next, he attacks Jaime Nebot, Guayaquil mayor and longtime political leader of Partido Socialcristiano, regarding some remarks by Nebot against immigrants from Peru and Colombia; the president takes advantage to go further in his criticism against the "Guayaquil model" championed by Nebot. The main

problem in Guayaquil, Correa summarizes, is inequality and not immigration. Finally, the president and his conversation partner introduce a segment to analyze news content and headlines from *El Comercio*, which allegedly is framing crime using manipulated statistics. Correa, in the above mentioned segment “free speech for all”, provides figures to discredit the mainstream press’ assessment about crime in the country. There are also strong reviews of some *El Universo*’s news content. The whole thing concludes with a summary in Kichwa of the main themes covered in the show.

The *Enlace Ciudadano 523*, the last *Sabatina*, produced in May 2017, gathered masses in the park Samanes, in Guayaquil; thousands attended. It was reported as a big event, after ten years of *Revolución Ciudadana*. The anchors of Gama TV (one of the television channels of the seized Isaías media group), as can be seen in the video, thank President Correa praising the “national transformation” before introducing the transmission of the live event. The main slogan in the first minutes of the show claims a “*década ganada*”, a decade has been won, and that “the Revolution has been accomplished”. The national anthem is played by a live orchestra. A song played in the show is dedicated to the retiring *Presidente Eterno* (“Aunque te vas, nunca te voy a olvidar”; “although you leave, I never going to forget you”, repeat the singers¹⁰⁴) and we see the same conversation partner as in the 2010 show.

¹⁰⁴ About this concrete song, released when Correa was about to leave in May 2017, something interesting and meaningful happened during my fieldwork in Quito in 2017. The first time I listened to this song I was in the office of one professor of one of the most prestigious universities in the country. The professor was explaining her views on Correa, and she wanted to show me that song. The moment she played it on YouTube on his computer she started to cry. Tears fell from her eyes, and I believe that they condensed important aspects of populist leadership. Personalization and identification, very common in populist leaders, are of course connected with emotional ties, but they can also be present in more ordinary politicians. Thus, one key question, raised by events such as that encounter with the professor, lies in populism’s capacity or might to increase those facets up to a point of deep identification and profound emotional bound between politics and ordinary (and not so ordinary) people.

“Thanks, Mashi¹⁰⁵, thanks Presi!”, he yells. Next, Correa starts recalling that the 2017 election was the first time that a presidential mandate ends peacefully since 1996. “This is a new democracy, not a formal democracy; here the president executes but it is the sovereign, it is the people who mandate”, says Correa echoing again that ‘plebiscitarian’ and not too liberal connection between the people and the government. He salutes the emigrants, thanking to them for all they did for the ‘fatherland’. He repeats about the deeply democratic practice of informing the citizens. Then he goes over ‘The Carondelet Museum’, a fascinating installation¹⁰⁶ created at the Presidential Palace in Quito’s old town to exhibit the government’s headquarters to visitors (for free) with spaces showing gifts and memorabilia from Correa’s foreign policy activities and meetings. Next, a young girl sings “sacred fatherland”. The president also explains Ecuador’s role supporting peace negotiations in Colombia and introduces sections and reportages, animating the crowd with jokes. There’s a segment called ‘Ecuador in positive’ in which Correa goes over Ecuador’s history since

¹⁰⁵ ‘Friend’, in Kichwa.

¹⁰⁶ I visited the Carondelet Museum in the summer of 2017 with a group of Ecuadorean citizens. This activity was worth the time. The display of the museum, presenting, among other things, all gifts given to Correa while he was president (presents from Vladimir Putin, the King of Saudi Arabia, the Chinese President, the Spanish King, the French President, etc.) performs a history of Ecuador, focused on the democratic (and non-democratic) periods experienced by the country. Regarding this aspect, an impressive installation got my attention. In a squared room, two big panels were shown in the opposite walls, facing each other; one portrayed all Ecuadorean presidents since the independence, the other, in front of all those political leaders, was made of hundreds of little pictures of ordinary citizens, representing the Ecuadorean people. The democratic presidents, elected by the people, were highlighted with a different color to differentiate them from the ones not elected (yellow versus grey). This is what I wrote in my journal a couple of hours after the visit: “The Carondelet Palace has been transformed into an institution rebuilt by Rafael Correa. He is there. The museum by which the visit (to the Palace) is recreated is made out basically by all the gifts or gestures given to Correa by international leaders. There are objects given by Putin, Evo Morales, Hugo Chávez, the King (of Spain) and a long et cetera. The tour has a pedagogical and democratic meaning. The Ecuadorean people is exalted... With Correa, omnipresent. The citizens with me in the tour (the trip is organized by groups and is free) wonder why there are not gifts received by other presidents, and our host talks about this question going back to Correa’s declarations during the last *Enlace Ciudadano* in Guayaquil inviting the other presidents to bring those gifts to the Palace. All is highly symbolic and political. Several individuals in the group murmur laughing ‘those kept everything for themselves’”.

2006 to highlight the *Revolución Ciudadana*'s achievements in contrast with the past; “forgetting is prohibited!”, “prohibido olvidar!”, Correa repeats recalling how bad the state of the country was before the “revolution” took over the nation.

Next, the leader announces a charity raffle and praises the Swedish courts' decision to close the case against Julian Assange, going back to the justification for granting asylum to the Australian hacker and journalist; the crowd welcomes that news, clapping their hands. Finally, around the segment 'Free speech for all', Correa reminds the new administration (Lenin Moreno's has been recently elected in a contested presidential race) that the 'corrupt press' must not set the agenda. The leader comments on the actuality of the Communication Law and the opposition's criticism against this legislation; “is reforming this law the most pressing issue in Ecuador?”, Correa asks himself. He then expounds on the question of press freedom, which, according to him, “is not business freedom; information is not another commodity, it is a right and they have the obligation to transmit it through the most transparent way”, Correa elaborates. “Information is so vital for life that if a company provides that public service, they need to fulfill some responsibilities, like health-care, potable water, etc. They think that since ‘the newspaper is mine, I can publish whatever I want’, and that's not real press freedom”, explains Correa. These diatribes are followed by a long segment about alleged lies published by commercial media. *Enlace*'s production utilizes sensationalist media techniques to illustrate its critical assessment though, such as the contrast between color and black and white images, slow-motion impactful sequences, or frozen images. The song sounding off in the background (“y todos los dias y todos los

días, los diarios publicando porquería”¹⁰⁷) is straightforward didactic. Finally, Correa’s partner in the TV program, the ‘misha’, performs a long summary of the show in Kichwa.

Enlace Ciudadano has been the subject of a limited number of studies (Rincon, 2008; Freidenberg, 2008; Chavero, Cerbino & Ramos, 2017) and many newspaper stories and opinion articles¹⁰⁸, but perhaps the most ambitious research about this medium may be the work proposed by Cerbino, Maluf and Ramos (2016). Their study is a complex discourse analysis that tries to go beyond the disqualification or downgrading of media such as *Enlace Ciudadano* or *Aló Presidente* portrayed as authoritarian tribunes exploited by demagogical leaders threatening the press and freedom of speech. In fact, that authoritarian gesture or the “authoritarianism specter” (Cerbino, Maluf & Ramos, 2016: 228) is observed in that book, based on the variety of discourses produced by a sample of *Enlace Ciudadano*’s shows and focus groups of ordinary Ecuadorian citizens expressing their views about *Enlace*’s signification. But that is not the only substantial finding, according to the authors. Cerbino, Maluf and Ramos, following Laclau’s understanding of populist logic, examine what they see as positive effects of *Enlaces*’ discourse on the imaginary of Ecuadoreans. Mainly, they find that *Enlace* pushed the people’s interest in participation and triggered a peculiar politicization of the population, contributing to the creation of “new subjectivities”. Their findings from focus groups are very interesting; among their observations there is an interesting differentiation between those individuals praising Correa as a brave leader

¹⁰⁷ “And every day, every day, the Press are publishing rubbish”.

¹⁰⁸ The most famous are, maybe, two stories published by *El Comercio* newspaper on May 26, 2012, and by *El Universo*, on January 11, 2011. See more at (<http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/politica/correa-rompe-ejemplar-dehora.html>) and (<https://www.eluniverso.com/2011/01/11/1/1355/cuatro-anos-regimen-cuenta-19-medios-comunicacion.html>).

increasing the nation's (and their personal) "self-esteem", and those for whom Correa appears as a "Messiah", producing some "terror" on individuals' behavior, acting as an omnipresent figure able to control everybody's lives. The clash between Correa and the mainstream media is also examined in the work, and people respond to that struggle mostly acknowledging the problems around press freedom and the bad shape of news media before Correa came to power.

All in all, that research, developed locally in a public, prestigious and plural university, recalls many of the analyses and descriptions introduced above, presenting the evolving elements covered by *Enlaces* from 2007 to 2017. Correa's role is central, as well as the charismatic and emotional bond established between the leader and the people; clashes with mainstream media have also a structural value in the production and the explicit political objectives of the show, besides the increased entertainment component, also stressed by Cerbino, Maluf and Ramos; as a matter of fact, they begin their work quoting Guy Debord's *Society of spectacle* and media/journalistic techniques (many of them of a sensationalist kind and not developed by Cerbino, Maluf and Ramos) make of *Enlace Ciudadano* a fascinating representation of how complex the actual relationship between media and populism can be. It is remarkable that the authors only use Bourdieu to reflect on how public opinion expresses "a system of tensions and forces" (2017, p. 185) and not to elaborate more on the French sociologist's theory of symbolic domination and symbolic capital's importance for the constitution of social fields. Bourdieu's concept, which connects the symbolic order with economic forces¹⁰⁹, can be useful to understand *Enlace's* role in the

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu merges objectivism (positivist or quantitative knowledge) and subjectivism (phenomenological or qualitative knowledge) in new complex concepts, such as *habitus*, or the "principles of the generation and

ongoing clash and opposition between Correa's government and the private media, examining from a representational or performance perspective how *Enlace* brought to the stage what key legal and institutional changes, triggered by the government, were doing over media's political economy.

On another note, a clear aspect of plebiscitarian or delegative democracy is displayed in *Sabatinas* as was already mentioned. This of course speaks about the populist stance of the show, seeking to connect directly the government (and especially his presidency) with the people, and that dimension may contain democratic outcomes, such as the development of participatory practices among citizens and the proximity between the rulers and the ruled; but it also bears vertical temptations, once the charismatic leader happened to be thought (by himself and by others) as a sort of 'special' citizen capable to embody the popular will without the support or assistance of other institutions that at some point may even be perceived as a sort of danger or enemy to the people's will so perfectly (and

structuring of practices which can be objectively regulated and regular" (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Something similar is proposed for symbolic domination (a phenomenological practice) and its association with the existence of social groups. Symbolic capital and symbolic domination thus appear as a sort of second representational order of the more objective and directly quantifiable first order of material and economic practices produced by social groups and classes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). Bourdieu echoes clearly Marx and Engels' foundational difference, firstly presented in *The German Ideology*, between production (the political economy or the more objective order) and ideology. Bourdieu problematizes and elaborates this distinction through concepts such as cultural capital, and symbolic capital, even borrowing Goffman's phenomenological sociology to clarify how this symbolic domination emerges. "These two modes of existence are not independent, even as representations enjoy a definite autonomy with respect to distributions: the representation that agents form of their position in social space (as well as the representation of it that they perform – in the theatrical sense, as with Goffman) is the product of a system of schemata of perception and appreciation (*habitus*) which is itself the embodied product of a condition defined by a definite position in distributions of material properties (objectivity I) and of symbolic capital (objectivity II), and which takes into account, not only the representations (which obey the same laws) that others have of this position and whose aggregation defines symbolic capital (commonly designated as prestige, authority, and so on), but also the position in distributions symbolically retranslated as lifestyle" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013, pp. 296-297). Adapting freely these categories to the Ecuadorean case, (and setting aside the problematic synthetic use of *habitus*) the new media's political economy would present fresh material properties, while *Enlace Ciudadano*, would represent in the symbolic order, those new 'objective' conditions.

undemocratically) incarnated by the *caudillo*, using the famous Hispanic concept. In any case, these are old problems associated with any serious discussion around democracy, at least since Rousseau's dilemma (2002) around the *legislator's* role to facilitate the general will when the popular power can't be represented due to the democratic nature of that power. In any case, populism as expressed in *Enlace*, presents direct challenges to the almost naturalized understanding of democracy as a liberal or representative setting, which, at its turn, seems also very often far from democratic principles.

In addition to that, besides its complicated nature, it should be clear at this point that *Enlace* was not a final product ready to support Correa's political program from the beginning: it adopted first an orthodox format, that changed over the years transforming the president's weekly address into a show full of music, with differentiated and carefully-produced segments and special guests. *Enlace* evolved because Correa's administration changed, as Correa's role as a political leader was transformed progressively. *Enlace*, I believe, was turned into a populist medium once the relationship between the government and mainstream media started to change between 2008 and 2009. Correa's clash with Palacio in May 2007 precedes for months the first expansion of *Enlace* in length and space (it would travel throughout the country) and the definitive addition of new segments and the fresh name added in 2009. I would argue that the presidential address was transformed into a full show (with music, several segments and generally strong production values) in 2010, overlapping, as we can recall from the previous chapter, critical moments and decisions around the dispute between Correa and the media.

Finally, these complex realities and transformations suggest that media and populism here didn't develop merely a conflictive interaction represented especially by the segment 'free speech for all'. It could be said that mostly a collaborative dynamic or a symbiotic relationship was established between the two worlds, the populist president and media grammars, techniques and resources. *Enlace*, at the end of the day, was a peculiar media product, with features similar at some extent to mainstream media productions. It can even be claimed that the changes which made of *Enlace* a more populist medium, also crafted a more refined show, able to blend politics, factual or data driven information (with an ideological leaning, of course), media criticism, sensationalist entertainment and Correa's media leadership acting as a veritable showman. In other words, the more populist *Enlace* was becoming the more media savvy, entertaining and audience appealing was the show. Correa, by the way, would use other media to connect himself directly to the people, and here Twitter would play an important role, making Correa one of the most followed Latin American leaders.¹¹⁰ Parallelisms between Correa and Hugo Chavez's media mastery expressed in their television shows are obvious, but Chavez's *Aló Presidente* never reached *Enlace*'s production level¹¹¹, which makes of Ecuador's *Sabatinas* a particularly interesting

¹¹⁰ Twitter has been part of Rafael Correa's public activity since 2010 and in a stunningly manner. He was the third most interactive Twitter user among prime ministers or Chiefs of State in 2015 (See more at: <https://digg.com/2015/ecuadors-president-does-all-his-own-tweets>) and is one of the most followed leaders in Latin America. Of course, his use of social media illustrates the figure, but we don't have enough space here, in this chapter, to discuss how Correa used several mediums. *Enlace* is, in any case, a medium more genuinely populist from its inception, and not indirectly connected or obliquely linked to populist communication as is the case of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram. All those media, though, share a common feature: they aim to reach individuals (or the people) with, apparently, the least mediation possible (Engesser et al, 2017).

¹¹¹ A quick note to compare, extremely briefly, those two populist shows: as shown in available videos or footage *Aló Presidente* seems always focused on Hugo Chávez's never-ending speech, the former *Comandante* controlling the stage, without clear differentiated segments. The people-audience is always seated in those shows; visibly disciplined although cheering the leader. And there's no recurring music besides Chávez's own singing and some special guests. In sum: Chavez's show production seems way more limited than *Enlace*'s

case, not matched by other populist leaders, at least in Latin America. As was highlighted from the beginning of this chapter, *Enlace* embraced the populist logic of appealing to the people directly, avoiding mainstream media, but it adopted, clearly, all media tricks and languages, even a sensationalist proto-commercial grammar, besides assimilating journalism's resources and disputing major concepts of the journalistic profession such as press freedom, headlining, framing or fact-checking. This struggle over journalism and media norms pushed by a pervasive populist actor— rarely analyzed in the literature focused on populist communication— which echoes the previous chapter's main argument, palpates obviously as one of the core vectors of this research, that is to say, the problematic understanding of the so-called mediatization process as a one-way colonizing movement conditioning politics (besides other fields), disregarding the reality of a more complex conflictive relationship made of exchanges and contributions between the two worlds. In fact, that key struggle over journalism triggered Correa's bold media reform that dramatically changed the country's media system. These legal and institutional changes will be the center of the next section.

2.- The legal and institutional change: public media, the law, and agencies

The institutional transformation of Ecuador's media system, one of the most intense in Latin America, adopted a path similar to *Enlace*: it evolved depending on the circumstances without a pre-designed plan. Additionally, as we advanced in the introduction of this chapter, this radical reform represented the political-economy dimension of Correa's

and it fails to adopt the entertainment/journalistic perspective, at least in the same way as Correa's weekly program.

challenge upon the Ecuadorean media system. *Enlace*'s symbolic objection to the traditional media *status quo*, therefore, was accompanied by a set of new institutions and policies that worked as a sort of material facet of the populist president's combat against the *ancient regime*, transforming the rules of the game, creating new public media and adopting explicit economic measures to transmute the traditional media system. This process was also criticized many times as a populist/authoritarian project, although those new laws and regulations were presented as measures aiming to increase diversity, pluralism and journalistic professionalism in the country, echoing similar processes in other Latin American nations with populism in power during those years. Almost inevitably polarized discussions about these reforms and policies would arise over the years, reaching to a special momentum with the passing of the Communication Law in 2013. In any case, the communicative populist revolt created with *Enlace* was logically followed by a vast reform package producing a sort of populist media regime that would reach some stability after 2013, although conflicts with mainstream media would never come to an end. On the other hand, as it will be explained in the following pages, journalism itself, its practices and values, was not at stake during the process; journalism was not directly contested as a profession or a valuable activity, but reaffirmed and promoted in a specific way, increasing the role of the state over media and defying the way journalism had been exercised in the country over the last decades,

The legal institutional transformation began in October 2007, when the first public broadcaster was created and named as Ecuador TV, although it would begin its emission in April 2008, coinciding with the commencement of the constituent process for the next

Constitution, one of the major promises made by Correa in the 2006 presidential election. The funding of Ecuador's first public media was facilitated by Venezuela's Banco de Desarrollo Social y Económico¹¹². However, it is important to recall that the establishment of public broadcasters (as well as the creation of media such as *Enlace Ciudadano*) were not part of Correa's government plan for the 2006 presidential elections. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, media policy didn't receive any attention in all the electoral propaganda or in Correa's main ideas and projects for the country during the campaign as it was reflected by the press¹¹³. This produces a more realistic picture of how the discussion on media or journalism and the subsequent media policy and strategies entered the national conversation: it was an issue that came up basically on the go. Some authors (Kitzberger, 2016; Lopez Vigil, 2013; Segura & Waisbord, 2016) have written about the influence of media reform movements on Rafael Correa's governments. But even if a critique about mainstream media was present in the 2005-2006 biennium and the previous years, and media had a very bad reputation among citizens as Latinobarometro's polls reflect, the political support of these movements' ideas during the campaign was weak and probably much of it was kept behind the doors of academic institutions as Ciespal, Flacso or Universidad Central de Ecuador, besides some alternative or community media associations. Probably those movements began to have more influence during the drafting of the 2008 Constitution, as

¹¹² During our conversation, Carlos Ochoa, the director of the Superintendencia de Comunicación, highlighted, with a striking self-induced transparency –I didn't ask anything regarding funding– that Hugo Chavez directly phoned Correa and promised 5 million dollars to help the creation of the new public network. That supposed commitment, in any case, was honored.

¹¹³ This article published by *El Universo* in November 2006 can be a perfect example of that absence of media policy in the campaign:
<https://www.eluniverso.com/2006/11/25/0001/8/BE47EF4C76874D59A1D2D559252DC44B.html>

Kitzberger (2016) explicitly points out, when the clash between government and media was already emerging. However, and this must be underscored also, the proposal of the creation of a constituent assembly was clear and highly relevant in Correa's campaign platform, although the actual content of this assembly was quite abstract during the presidential race and mostly centered on economic issues.

The year 2008 indeed was prolific in the inception of new institutions and decisions regarding media, while, at the same time, the country's representatives were drafting a new Constitution to replace the 1998 Supreme Charter. First, in March *El Telégrafo*, an old newspaper created in Guayaquil in 1884, was founded anew as a state-owned journal¹¹⁴; its first director was Rubén Montoya, a journalist trained in Argentina. Next, in April, Ecuador TV would start broadcasting. In July, the administration seized Grupo Isaías' assets as a partial payment of the debt of 1 billion dollars incurred by the banker's group after the financial crisis of 1999. Together with the public television, Correa's administration now had control over the most powerful media company in the country by turnover in 2007. Grupo Isaías comprised lots of media, such as channels TV Cable, TC Television, Gamavision, later renamed Gama TV (the one that would broadcast *Enlace Ciudadano*), Cable Deportes, HTV and several radio stations and magazines. Finally, in August, the government created Radio Pública del Ecuador (Ecuador Public Radio) using the frequencies of the dormant Radio Nacional del Estado with a total investment of 1.2 million dollars. Its first director was Enrique Arosemena, also acting as Ecuador TV's manager;

¹¹⁴ The former owner of *El Telégrafo*, Fernando Aspiazu, owed money to the national government and technically the newspaper was an asset controlled by the government before Correa came to power. It was an almost extinct newspaper when Correa's government decided to use its brand and facilities and revived the newspaper as a public medium.

Arosemena, with a technocratic profile, a B.A. from Florida Atlantic University and a M.B.A. from Universidad Argentina de la Empresa, was in charge of several agencies of the following Correa Administrations. The next *Radio Pública* director would be Giovanna Tassi, an Italian from Monza with years of experience as a journalist in Ecuador (in newspaper *La Hora* and small community media in the Oriente province); Tassi remained in the position until her resignation in 2018.

Meanwhile, as already mentioned, constituent elections were held in September 2007, and the nation's representatives were convened in the city of Montecristi to discuss a new Constitution. As highlighted above, media reform advocates participated in the discussions; in fact, journalist Orlando Pérez, appointed as *El Telégrafo's* director in 2011, was the Communications Secretary of the constituent assembly, which was presided by Alberto Acosta, a progressive economist very close to Correa and member of Radio La Luna's editorial board. Paco Velasco, La Luna's creator, was an assembly member for Alianza País, Correa's political party, together with other critical journalists such as Pilar Núñez or Maria Augusta Calle, who "functioned as liaisons with organizations associated with the alternative media and, with various levels of participation, took the lead in drafting the constitution's section on communication" (Kitzberger, 2016: 93). A 'forum on communication' was established during the conversations to discuss specific topics around media, journalism or communication issues.

2.1.- A pro-State Constitution and Communication Law

The Montecristi Constitution, written by a constitutional assembly in which Correa's party, Alianza Pais, was represented with 80 out of a total of 130 seats, was promulgated by referendum in October 2008, and granted new rights related to communication issues, adopting a clear stance supporting the active role of the state, intervening and regulating the nation's media system. Accordingly, once article 16 of the Constitution recognizes the right to plural, open, diverse, inclusive and free communication, section 17 requires that the state takes an active role in fomenting those goals. Provisions 18 and 19, for their part, guarantee access and require further legislation to establish the "prevalence of content with informative, educational and cultural purposes". Article 20 declares the conscience clause "for those who inform, emit opinions or work in any communication activity", and there are also other sections and articles focused on the nationalities' right to communicate (Chapter 4), the right to reply (Chapter Six), political representation in public media (article 115), prohibition of media ownership for financial entities or banks (article 312) and freedom of speech (article 384). In the last sections, the Constitution demands, through a transitory provision, the creation of a Communication Law to further regulate, promote and support the rights granted.

Therefore, the 2008 Constitution's role in the creation of new institutions and legislation to regulate media is beyond dispute, but let's clarify that this Constitution, one of the longest in the world, was utterly ambitious in a number of fields besides communication, from food sovereignty and environmental rights to the protection of national assets or requirements for foreign investment. Or in other words, the Constitution designed an

ambitious new legal-institutional architecture for the whole Ecuadorean state and this pro-state drive shaped the approach towards many areas of the Ecuadorean society. In sum, if a broad argument about the new constitution had to be emphasized, mostly compared to previous Constitutions, it must be focused on the “rhetoric of normative promises” (Basabe, 2009: 404) on new rights guaranteed to the citizenship and on the central role dedicated to the state in guaranteeing, promoting and supporting those rights.

Related to the state’s central role, some authors (Corrales, 2008; Basabe, 2009; Freidenberg & Pachano, 2016; Meléndez & Moncagatta, 2016) have identified a *hyper-presidential* tendency in the Constitution, besides the addition of institutions that some authors consider alien to liberal traditions. This is the case, for instance, of Consejos de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social (CPCCS), organs elected by the citizens that supplement or complement the work of the members of the national assembly in many areas and who participate in the designation of key positions in the Ecuadorean government, from the Attorney General to the Comptroller or the new Superintendencias which operated important fields, such as financial regulation (v.g. Superintendencia de bancos) or communication (Superintendencia de comunicación, or Supercom). Consequently, the increased capacity of the president, openly designed by the constituents to facilitate governance and avoid standstill situations depending on the relations between the legislative and the executive, has produced frequent accusations of *neo-caudillismo* or an authoritarian drive latent in the text. Müller (2017) and Landau (2018) have labeled this new legal architecture as a “populist constitution”, highlighting those innovations as a clear step toward an authoritarian or illiberal regime. Conaghan (2016) has expounded on those

‘illiberal’ aspects, drawing from the “contradictions of the Constitution” to the degeneration of the “delegative democracy” established and pushed by Correa, now without any horizontal or vertical checks to balance an all-mighty executive power. However, other legal analyses (Garcia Roca, 2017) point out, on the contrary, a ‘*parlamentarization*’ of the Ecuadorean presidential regime in line with similar hybrid processes in Europe and Latin America; articles 130, 131 and 148, regulating, for instance, votes of no confidence on ministers and early or snap elections (called by the assembly or by the president) contradict a straightforward illiberal characterization of the 2008 Constitution¹¹⁵.

Among the numerous constitutional amendments carried out since the promulgation of the 2008 Constitution, there is one, which was already mentioned in the previous chapter, that added significant institutional changes to the Ecuadorean media market. It was the consultation held in 2011 which approved more limitations to media ownership beyond those established by the Constitution in article 312 for financial companies. That new regulation restricted media ownership to actual media companies and prohibited other firms and corporations (focused on finance or other non-communication centered activities) to invest in media. It was also widely criticized by journalists’ associations and international media and organizations because of the intended or unintended effects on the financial stability of media companies, which saw their funding possibilities sharply constrained.

¹¹⁵ The 1998 Constitution, on the contrary, didn’t provide legal room for votes of no confidence for ministers, nor for recall election nor for the call of early elections. Obviously, these new democratic instruments, basic in parliamentary regimes although alien to Americas’ presidential regimes, can’t be called illiberal, but mostly the opposite, since they increase the capacity of the legislative body to control the government.

In any case, the Ley Orgánica¹¹⁶ de Comunicación (here always translated as Communication Law) was of course the most expected expansion of those provisions centered on media and communication promulgated in the 2008 Constitution. Waiting for a long time to be passed due to the reinforced majority needed in the national assembly, it was finally approved in June 2013, and it quickly sparked harsh criticism locally and throughout the world. Press freedom rating organizations, other media and journalism associations and international media, nicknamed the legislation as ‘gag law’, posing concerning questions about press freedom and free speech¹¹⁷. This law, which didn’t cover the Internet explicitly, defined media as a public service and institutionalized the principle of division of the broadcast spectrum into three equal parts: public media, private media and community media. It was broad in scope and included significant regulations not only of market structure (banning banks or financial institutions and international media conglomerates from investing in media companies, for instance), but also of media content. It introduced, for example, a requirement that five percent (article 36) of content be devoted to multicultural coverage (of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities, for example), and incorporated provisions related to sex and violence in television content (article 61). It had explicit

¹¹⁶ The adjective ‘orgánica’ refers to a type of law that covers specific and/or fundamental rights or/and foundational institutions of the state. It is a figure originated in French constitutional law, which is situated between ordinary laws (requiring a basic quorum to be passed by the parliament) and the Constitution itself or foundational constitutional dispositions. Normally, 2/3 or 3/5 of the votes in the parliament are required for an organic law to be passed. This figure’s inception, which is also used in Latin American constitutional law, goes back to France’s 1958 Constitution (Garcia de Enterría & Fernández, 2006: 153-164).

¹¹⁷ For instance, *The New York Times* published several articles (news and opinion) about the law (see at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/15/world/americas/ecuador-legislature-approves-curbs-on-news-media.html> or <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/opinion/ecuadors-political-eruption.html>) and the Committee to Protect Journalists was “dismayed” by the approval of the law (<https://cpj.org/2013/06/cpj-dismayed-by-approval-of-media-law-in-ecuador/>)

mentions to deontological rules (article 9) to be applied by media professionals and companies, developed the right to reply (article 24) and added the right to rectification (article 23), which directly mentions wrongdoings in journalism's professional procedures. Article 26 established media lynching or "linchamiento mediático", a new concept highly criticized and never presented in previous drafts of the law (Lopez Vigil, 2013), that was widely seen as intended to prevent negative reporting on political actors. Article 29 was another important innovation, recognizing and reinforcing journalists' right to 'conscious clause' against pressures from media's management or ownership. Finally, some provisions were incorporated (article 44, mostly) regarding media professionals' labor conditions, and requiring education qualifications (college degrees in fields related to communication) to practice journalism.

Two important regulatory bodies were created. First, the Consejo Ecuatoriano de Regulación y Desarrollo de la Información y Comunicación (Cordicom) monitored allocation of frequencies, and general content norms (like time slot rules to protect children), besides keeping a public record of media present in the country and proposing measures to improve the defense and implementation of the law. This agency was governed by a Secretary appointed by the national government and a board formed by members designated by the national government, the Ecuadorean *Defensor del Pueblo* or ombudsman, local governments and the CPCCS. Secondly, the Superintendencia de Comunicación (Supercom) enforced those policies established by the law and had the power to sanction media for violations of the law. The Supercom board was formed by representatives selected by the national government, the CPCCS and the National Assembly. Cordicom's rationale and

functions were very similar to comparable institutions in Europe, monitoring basic rules regarding broadcasting programs and specific content related to sex, violence, age, etc. Supercom, however, didn't hold parallelisms with democratic countries and boosted and channeled the implementation of vague and controversial principles such as media lynching situations, or utilized arbitrarily more established legal figures such as the right of reply and rectifications. What was more problematic is that Supercom could initiate regulatory enforcement *ex officio*, which meant that the agency could be used by the incumbent government to monitor media. Moreover, the agency's first and only director, Carlos Ochoa, was a well-known journalist very close to Correa and on no account a consensus figure to supervise the media's regulation.

Supercom, according to the agency itself, counted in 2017 around 400 officials¹¹⁸, many of them dedicated to inspecting media content (through sampling of different areas of the territory) or to funneling rectifications or replies to the media (*ex officio* or supporting ordinary citizens, associations, companies, etc.). Besides officials specialized in media and communication, several lawyers or legal experts advised the institution. Accusations of arbitrariness, censorship or political bias in the agency were frequent since the very first day of the operation. There was a special concern regarding the right of reply and rectifications on behalf of the government (asking the media outlet to rectify or to change this or that

¹¹⁸ Data directly retrieved from Supercom during my visit and interview with Carlos Ochoa in the summer of 2017. The interview, which was recorded on video by the institution, was fascinating. Ochoa was always accompanied by other officials providing data and documents. Among those employees monitoring and analyzing content mostly in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, were former journalists and also alleged experts in semiotics, sociologists or anthropologists. Some of the journalists interviewed explained their confusion when they received a semiotic analysis to justify a rectification of some front page or photography. There are also reports and analyses available explaining those methods by Cordicom and Supercom; for this study I'm using a Multi-Modal Analysis published by Cordicom in 2017, and a Comparative Report regarding the Observation of the Communication Law of 2015, posted by Supercom in 2016.

content), and the way these replies and rectifications were executed, sometimes aiming to replace pieces of information with blatantly biased content supporting the government's perspective. The difficult measurement and vague nature of media lynching also raised many problems. Failure to respond to all these actions (motivated by private parties, the government or *ex officio*) led to onerous fees, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars depending on the issue¹¹⁹. The new legal jargon and corresponding procedures pushed media companies to expand their legal teams or to focus part of their budgets on legal issues raised by the new agencies. Many of the subjects interviewed for this research were also assertive detractors of Supercom, as this agency was probably the most hated institution of all created during Correa's era. Several of them expounded several cases of biased rectifications during the fieldwork as perfect examples of Correa's government inquisitorial drive against private media; these concerns and cases will be treated and analyzed in chapters 4 and 5 where views on policy and its influence on journalism and news content are the central subject. In any case, a number of organizations, especially Fundamedios in Ecuador¹²⁰ and international associations such as Reporters without Borders, Freedom House or the Committee to Protect Journalists, supported those observations and were strongly opposed to this agency's activities and its very existence.

Additionally, other institutions, such as Consejo Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (Conatel), already mentioned in the previous chapter, and established by the Ministry of

¹¹⁹ For not responded rectifications, possibly the most frequent conflict between the government and the media, the Communication Law asked for a fee of "10% of the 12th part of the annual budget of the medium".

¹²⁰ Extremely active in pointing out Supercom's and the government's abuses, Fundamedios stores a number of cases on its website. The analysis on Supercom's cases would be developed in chapters 4 and 5. Some of them are available at <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/tag/supercom/>

Telecommunications and the Information Society in 2009, were reformed after the Communication Law. Meanwhile the Consejo Nacional de Radio y Televisión (Conartel), which regulated the radioelectric spectrum since 1995, was replaced by the Agencia de Control y Regulación de las Telecomunicaciones (Arcotel) in 2015, which assumed similar functions together with Cordicom. Other new institutions would be added to this complex organizational setting. Regarding media, the creation of a state-owned press agency, Agencia Pública de Noticias del Ecuador y Suramérica (Andes) in December 2009 was particularly meaningful, as well as the central government's continuing support of small media, regional or local newspapers, radios or televisions, all over the country, as well as the creation of local or regional public media.

On another note, in relation to the topic of community media, –some of them well-known Correa supporters in the 2006 presidential election–, it seems as if the wish of many research institutions (domestic and international) and alternative media advocates didn't match the reality of the spread and scope (and political influence) of this type of media. The Communication Law expanded legal protections and possibilities for community media, a very dispersed, organizationally weak, locally and ethnically centered media, but their growth was limited and basically focused on the strengthening of media already established before Correa came to power (Acosta & Calvopiña, 2017: 39-41). Community media thus experienced a consolidation or some advances (Acosta & Calvopiña: 54) but far from the plan designed in the law of allocating a third of the media to community outlets. These were still very affected by the lack of infrastructure, unfriendly local governments and ethnicities,

linguistic issues (especially for media related to indigenous nationalities) or the strong influence of religious organizations.

Community media thus hardly assumed a very influential role in the media polarization taking place in Ecuador after Correa came to power. As a matter of fact, those three components of the media environment envisioned by the law (private, public and community media) were transformed into a basic struggle between pro-government and anti-government media, where public and mainstream private media battled for the hegemonic narrative (“la lucha por el relato”¹²¹, according to many participants) in the national public sphere. The aggressive reform of the Ecuadorean media market enacted by the law and regulations, besides the seizure of Isafías group in 2008, changed the position of private media in the national market, although most of the media already established before Correa maintained their integrity. The main exceptions to that private stability were the change of ownership of Teleamazonas, which was discussed in the previous chapter, and the sale of Grupo El Comercio and RTS television in 2015 to Albavision, a corporation owned by the Mexican media mogul Angel González. The Teleamazonas sale in 2010, by which the conglomerate was sold to its own workers and other non-financial companies, was always object of criticism and suspicion by Correa’s government, and the broadcaster didn’t change its oppositional tone against the government or its conservative editorial line¹²². On the other

¹²¹ Literally translated would be “the fight for the narrative”. This sentence and meaning are not very common in English, but in Spanish is quite straightforward or self-explanatory and could be paraphrased, using the Gramscian language, as the fight for the hegemonic discourse in the public sphere.

¹²² To illustrate this point, one of the last interviews given by Correa in 2016 was broadcasted by Teleamazonas in the political show Hora 25 and resulted in a rugged discussion between Correa and the journalist Andrés Carrión with sharp attacks in both directions. See more at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JwrfKNYhAY&t=574s>

hand, Grupo El Comercio's case sparked criticism since the transaction, completed by an international company, contradicted the Communication Law's prohibition on foreign investment¹²³. Another event worth of mentioning was *Hoy's* shut down in 2014. The owner of this newspaper founded in Quito in 1982 –of a centrist ideology, or even social-democrat according to some informants, the only one of that kind in the country– denounced that the law made the business inviable due to limitations on private investment, whereas the government denied any of these allegations by pointing out to chronic economic problems due to inadequate management.

Furthermore, the existence of parallel media reform processes in other Latin American countries, especially in those with other ruling populist presidents, must be stressed: Correa's path towards media reform was not happening in the void. Venezuela had seen the enactment of new media policies and the creation of fresh public media institutions under the rule of Hugo Chávez, who came to power in 1998 also supported by the mainstream media, who abhorred of the former *Comandante* very quickly. In 2000 Chavez's government passed the Ley Orgánica de Telecomunicaciones, which strengthened the state's role over media markets; this law would be complemented in 2002 by the Ley de Comunicación del Poder Popular¹²⁴ aiming to increase support and funding to community

¹²³ This interdiction was resolved in the by-law that developed the legislation, permitting the sale due to the existence of subsidiary companies established in Ecuador which would perform the management of such media companies. This sale wasn't translated into a stark editorial change in *El Comercio*, as content analysis performed for this study reveals when comparing the Quito newspaper stances and framing with Guayaquil's *El Universo*, whose ownership remained intact. *El Comercio*, as shown in content analysis, was slightly less adversarial against Correa compared to *El Universo*, but it wasn't in any case its supporter and featured very often dramatic denunciations against the government in its opinion pages and published very critical content in the news section.

¹²⁴ Popular Power Communication Law.

and alternative media, and by the Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio y Televisión¹²⁵ in 2004. Argentina, ruled by populist Peronist Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, would pass its own new media policy in 2009; the Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual¹²⁶ would regulate media markets (with specific provisions against concentration of ownership), general content related to age, sex or violence, and would increase dramatically the state support to national media production, especially cinema. Other media laws would be also passed in Uruguay (in 2014, although it would never be totally applied) and Bolivia (in 2011, focused on telecommunications but strengthening the role of the government over media institutions). Ecuador, in conclusion, would be part of a trend of media reform driven most of the times, meaningfully, by the rising populist governments of the early 2000s, connecting again, in some way, the emerging of powerful (and popular) populist actors in the region with the promotion of new media policies and regulations, the creation of public media and the strengthening of the role of the state in the media system. However, and given Ecuador's reform overarching scope, including the evaluation and possible sanctions linked to media content, Correa's policies were possibly among the boldest and deepest in the region.

Summing up, Correa's successive administrations built a long and winding road full of new institutions, incorporating fresh or reformed public and private companies, new legislation, agencies or regulatory bodies. Or, in other words, Correa's government intervened in and transformed the media system in ways no other previous administrations dared to even think about, even compared to the 1970s military juntas. And all of this process began without any concrete program explained beforehand by the political movement

¹²⁵ Social Responsibility on Radio and Television Law.

¹²⁶ Audiovisual Communication Services Law.

represented by Correa; this central issue was unfolded progressively, on the go. That dynamic and unplanned development makes this legal-institutional dimension comparable to *Enlace Ciudadano's* evolution, but parallelisms between these two communicational processes do not end here, supporting our argument about the interdependent roles of *Enlace* (in the symbolic order) and media reform (in the political-economy or 'production' order). The legal and institutional change also presented a challenge to the established norms and practices of local journalism, defying and contesting the way the news profession had been exercised in the Andean country for decades. As happened to *Enlace*, the 'populist' Constitution and its new legal figures, the aim of democratizing media, the emphasis on public media and public service were also depicted not as a frontal assault on journalism or a denial of journalism's values. On the contrary, the government seemed to be eager and even forced by the law to impose professional journalism on any media company in the nation to the point of detailing deontological codes on the law. If *Enlace* tried to appropriate journalism's and entertainment media's norms and practices to convey a direct message from the leader to the people combating mainstream private media's traditional practices and prestige, the government through the law aimed to make media 'open', 'professional' and 'democratized', or mostly 'controlled by the people' as it could be, amid the bitter criticism from domestic and international mainstream media and a number of international organizations. Correa's populism in this context was not exactly a rejection of journalism and media practices, but their reappropriation by the political project led by Correa and his allies. However, a particular version of journalism and news media, defined by its relationship with the market and the state, seemed to be prevalent in the ideas and decisions

made by Correa and his allies in the government, and this important aspect will be reviewed in chapter 4. Nonetheless, I will show, that perspective on journalism and media does not diminish the overall drive of revisiting versions of journalism widely shared and supported in Ecuador and abroad. In the conclusion section of this chapter, we advance the discussion about this relationship focusing on the specific intersections between populist communication and journalism.

3.- Discussion: Populism, journalism and the complex competitive symbiosis

As shown in the decisions taken by the once populist candidate and since 2007 populist president, and throughout the evolution of his media actions and policies, Correa's populist communication and media policy shared a dynamic and unplanned elaboration, but they ended up forming a consistent path challenging media's status quo in a double way, materially (through deep legal and institutional reform) and symbolically (via the action of Correa himself and through *Enlace Ciudadano's* transgressive communication). However, they also participated in a peculiar interaction, or even intersection, with journalism and media grammars and formats. If in chapter 1 we saw how a specific media environment was perfectly understood and exploited by Correa's electoral platform, once the populist candidate was in power, he started to change his more or less subordinated or traditional position towards media into a straightforward pro-active role, although not exactly from the first the day of his presidency. Furthermore, to the former stellar enemies, the *partidocracia* and financial oligarchies, a new evil antagonist against the interests of the Ecuadorean people was added: the 'corrupt press'. In the previous chapter we analyzed the reasons behind this

shift between the candidate and the president but here, via the two major projects launched and developed by the incumbent populist, we witness something more than a dialectical or antagonistic relationship. Rather, in this episode, as introduced in the conclusion of the previous chapter, we observe a complex symbiosis between a political populist logic and a media logic, made of tensions and exchanges reflected in the symbolic and material challenges to media's traditional status quo.

This reality is to be fully unfolded in following sections and chapters, but it can be grasped in Fernando Alvarado's narration of *Enlace Ciudadano's* development that introduced this chapter. Let's recall that Alvarado was not only one of the chief minds behind *Enlace*; this politician, brother of Vinicio –Correa's Public Administration minister and the spin doctor behind Correa's campaigns in 2006, 2009 and 2013–, was also the boss of the national public media and responsible for enforcing the Communication Law since 2013. I believe that drawing from his own words may forge an original approach to examine how populist communication worked in Correa's Ecuador, hence the use of his arguments to start and finish this chapter. Additionally, we can use his discourse not only to test his declarations with the laws, institutions and actions here examined during Correa's presidency, but also to review how the available literature has seen populist communication and how this may explain (or not) the Ecuadorean case.

Let's recall that according to Alvarado, the first goal for *Enlace Ciudadano* was the quest of a direct connection between the government and the people, avoiding thus the mediation by journalists. This definition fits perfectly many descriptions of populist communication; yet that is not what Alvarado is exactly saying. To that goal of a direct 'link'

(the word for ‘enlace’ in Spanish) with citizenship, Alvarado adds the importance of an aesthetic dimension in communication, and the contrast between versions of truth, echoing one of the most famous journalistic professional norms of verifying sources, or ‘*contrastar las fuentes*’. So, populist communication, in its purportedly purest format here, was not only about the avoidance of established media or professional guilds. Additionally, as we have observed in the second section of the chapter, Correa’s populist presidency transformed the Ecuadorean media system not only allegedly to silence *la prensa corrupta*’s criticism but also to purportedly boost pluralism, diversity and journalistic professionalism in the media. It was not hence the rejection of journalism or the media itself that drove *Enlace* and Correa’s media reform, but a distinct perspective about journalism and media.

3.1.- Dominant negativism, subordination and exchange

The relationship between populism and the media has been mostly portrayed as a negative association (*dominant negativism*) inasmuch populism tries to overcome mainstream media, establishing that direct link with the people, avoiding the mediation of journalists who very often are portrayed as corrupt and unsympathetic with the people’s will. This is the first aspect outlined in Alvarado’s discourse. There have been also other alternative approaches, as we will see below, focused on what I would call a *subordinate* role of populism regarding media, that is to say, approaches that observe populism as a sort of byproduct of media logic, or, more rarely, on the opposite direction, views that situate populism as the driving logic and media as the adapted force; there are also other original views that posit an *exchange* between these two worlds, a sort of not clearly explained

partnership that benefit both sides. We will discuss all these views, although it should be underscored that the dominant analytical positions tend to see populism's interaction with journalism with a negative lens. This overall point of view is overwhelmingly present in the available empirical literature, in many case studies, theoretical assessments and descriptive reports, besides the public discussion which tends to frame populism with a hostile gaze.

For instance, Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser's prolific research on the subject, well summarized in their book *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (2012), offer a consistent mainstream understanding of the phenomenon. In that specific work, different cases (Venezuela, Austria, Peru or Mexico, among others) are compared to check the connection between liberal democracy and populism and the alleged negative or positive effects of populist actors in the government or in the opposition in consolidated and non-consolidated democracies. Following their conclusions, Ecuador (a non-consolidated democracy) would be a case in which populism undermines liberal democracy, and the threat to press freedom is explicitly mentioned. Other analyses support starker convictions about the dark side of populism, such as the observations provided by a task force of researchers established by the University of Washington in 2018 under the name of *The global implications of populism on democracy*. The UW's team sees populism as a menace to democracy at several levels of analysis, such as judicial independence, political rights of disadvantaged groups, press freedom and gender equality, and assesses the situation in a number of countries from Brazil, Hungary or the United States to Venezuela and Poland. Other well-known essays (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; De la Torre, 2010; Kellam & Stein, 2016; Kenny, 2020; Müller, 2016; Waisbord,

2018) abound on the same aspect, denouncing populism's threat for free journalism. Some other empirical studies have been focused on the actual negative effects of populist communication –always defined by that goal of the appeal to the people and anti-elitist stances– in middle-range theories, looking at specific populations and environments, mostly in Western Europe¹²⁷.

However, beyond those empirical, theoretical or speculative conclusions around populist communication, the second dimension pointed out in Alvarado's discourse regarding that necessary "aesthetic" work to entertain the citizens, has been also associated with populist phenomena although this time in a more subordinated manner (added to the standard negative lens in some approaches) where populism follows, is triggered or appears functional to a commercial media logic of expanding audience ratings. Populism here thus would echo 'popular', tabloid or sensationalist media (regardless its format) designed, most of all, to attract the largest audiences. However, it wouldn't be reduced to that media field; populism would also work as a valuable logic for elite or legacy media, interested (many times in a negative way) in its transgressive features, besides the purported commercial added value. I would underline three approaches around this ambit of research: a first one that directly links a commercial media logic with populism's features; a second one very connected with the former, which explores how a performative dimension explains the

¹²⁷ Even though these studies don't provide a larger argument about populism in its varied manifestations –on media content, public opinion, attitudes or electoral behavior–, many of these examinations emit a shared signal of dealing with a concerning political phenomenon. The menace comes in form of an effect of the increasing negative attitudes toward immigrants (Wirtz et al, 2018), in populism's persuasive might to combine with preexisting factors, setting aside any engagement function (Hameleers et al, 2018) or in populist reinforcement of pre-existing male-centric attitudes (Bobba et al, 2018). In sum, populists' content or messages, populism's communication in short, seems to produce negative or, at least, worrisome effects on pre-existent negative attitudes among the individuals.

populism-media association, and a third one that observes how some specific media adopt a populist logic to boost audience and support a particular political agenda.

The Italian political communication scholar Gianpietro Mazzoleni (2008; 2014) is possibly one of the most well-known representatives of the first approach and together with Meyer (2006), proposes an explicit association between populism and commercial media logic, probably inspired by the particular alliance between media and politics in his home country, finely represented by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's media skills¹²⁸. Mazzoleni, informed by the early work on populism as a "communication style" by Jagers & Walgrave (2007), highlights a relationship between the transformation of media's role in politics in the last decades and the relevance of populism. Drawing from his seminal work with Schulz (1999), in which Mazzoleni analyses these processes through a lens about media logic's worrisome dominance over politics, the Italian author finds a clear connection between mediatization and populism. In sum, it seems that a commercial media logic is basically the 'midwife' of emerging populist leaders:

There is an ongoing adaptation of political public performances, language and at times even policymaking, to the demands of an increasingly commercialized mass media. Thus, the mediatization of political communication is often identified with the marketization of the public representation of politics. The implications of such changes in the realm of politics are diverse and all relate, to varying extents, to the dynamics of populism (Mazzoleni, 2008: 52).

¹²⁸ Comically illustrated by Mancini (2011) observing Berlusconi's savvy management of Italian audience's preferences. Mancini uses one case in which Berlusconi, then Italy's prime minister, improvised as contributor for a sports show (focused mostly on soccer or *calcio*) discussing Milan A.C. (owned by Berlusconi) ideal line-up to win the Champions League. Mancini stresses the particular populist dimension of this unexpected *direct* performance of the prime minister interrupting the course of a soccer show to explain his argument for around one hour, allegedly skyrocketing the show's audience rate for that day.

Australian scholar Benjamin Moffitt's work (2016) represents the second approach; and although his theses seem very aligned to Mazzoleni's basic argument, Moffitt intensifies the performative dimension and amplifies the scope of the research from Western Europe to the whole globe. According to Moffitt, performance and political style are the best defining features for populism, and a populist political style matches the necessities of a media logic that is fueled by techniques very well studied by political communication scholarship. These techniques can be classified as "simplification, polarization, intensification, personalization, visualization and stereotypization" (Strömback cited by Moffitt, 2016: 75); "emotionalization and an anti-establishment attitude" (Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, *ibidem*); "negativism, sports-based dramatization and the triumph of 'style' over 'substance'" (Plasser and Ulram, *ibidem*); "the prioritization of conflict" (McManus, *ibidem*); "focus on scandals" (Sabato, Stencel, and Linchter, *ibidem*); and "privileging of the visual over other senses" (Bucy and Grabe, *ibidem*). Moffitt, summarizing some of those characteristics, proposes that populism, as a style, presents at least three key core features (Moffitt, 76) easily translated to those known techniques: a) *Appeal to the people* (marked by the dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the elite', an antielite/establishment/system or the denial of expert knowledge); b) *Bad manners* (represented by the disregard for 'appropriateness', the 'political incorrectness', or the 'colorfulness' of populism performance); and c) *Crisis, breakdown, threat* (visible in the demand to act decisively, the distaste for complexity or the instrumentalization of politics). The resonance of those properties among conspicuous populist leaders is obvious, although Moffitt quickly takes note that those attributes can easily be adopted by more mainstream politicians, making of populism (and I believe this is

his main argument) more the matter of a communication style than the center of a thick ideological discussion. Moffitt's theses, in any case, seem also to underscore populism's functionality, matching media needs and logics and they relate to Alvarado's discourse, although in an inverse way. While Alvarado, representing the populist, wants to increase the audience using media techniques to support his political agenda, Moffitt seem to argue that it is media who couples with populism to attract audience, to get attention, to enhance persuasion and to increase ratings, webpage visits or likes on social media posts.

The American Reece Peck (2019), finally, suggests another perspective exploring Fox News' adoption of populist rhetoric. According to Peck, Fox News, one of the most watched news networks in the United States since 2002, appropriated populism to increase ratings and, at the same time, to reframe a political-ideological agenda in the American public sphere. In Peck's study populism has a starting positive connotation, a conception that was common in American politics at least until the election of Donald Trump as president shocked the American political and media establishment in 2016¹²⁹. Let's remember that populism in the United States, as in Latin America, was seen as a progressive thin ideology, intimately related to the rise of the People's Party at the end of the Nineteenth century, and Peck starts from this assumption building on how a progressive approach dividing the world between the people and the elites was appropriated by Robert Ailes's

¹²⁹ As a matter of fact, populism in the US was not as widely researched as in Western Europe until the rise of Trump and its allies, notably Steve Bannon, who constantly labeled Trump and his movement as populist, something rare in the American right-wing Republican sphere. There is a highly enlightening interview with Steve Bannon, former Donald Trump's political advisor, aired and transcribed by PBS, which explicitly addresses the question of Trump's populism. See more at <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/steve-bannon-3/>

invention. “In 2009 and 2010, Fox News would post some of the highest ratings in its twenty-two-year history and would help redirect public anger away from corporate America toward government” (5), says Peck in his Introduction. It is interesting to note that here populism performance is used by media not just to increase ratings but also to set out a specific (and creative) political agenda expressed on new conservative policies related to immigration, trade, and what has been called as identity wars or cultural struggles. Peck, who uses Laclau’s work on populism to understand Fox News’s phenomenon, shows how populism’s core feature of drawing a line (a “frontier” in Laclau’s terminology) dividing the society between the people and some antagonist, determines the ideological direction of the television company. Thus, instead of establishing the frontier between a diverse American people against the wealthy 1% or the financial or corporate oligarchies, Fox seems to set very different divisions, pointing out, for instance, a primary struggle between a mostly white Anglo-Saxon people (representing the “real America”) against the alliance of liberal professionals and foreign immigrants. That hegemonic discourse, according to Peck, even helped to change the ideological direction of specific cultural manifestations (Country music, for instance) or used journalistic norms to create a particular view of the United States’ major problems and alleged solutions. The use of journalistic norms and codes is particularly highlighted by the author as a form of obtaining an authoritative voice supporting, at the same time, what are neat partisan ideological lines, as if the medium was able to borrow professional legitimizing codes to reinforce its rhetorical strength.

Fox News’ use of experts and journalism professional norms connects Peck’s work with the third dimension formulated by Alvarado’s declarations, that is to say: the

association between journalism, its norms and professional practices, and populism. This domain, addressing a sort of exchange between populism and professional journalism is almost unexplored, although there are some studies mostly around populist media, or journalism's bottom-up values as representative of 'The Voice of the People'¹³⁰ that could trigger a discussion around populism and journalism's shared values. This aspect is more carefully examined by Kramer (2014) in his analysis on how populist media, represented by tabloids and the radio in his work, elicit a relationship between media, society and politics that doesn't dissolve the role of media but changes it. Kramer enumerates four structural conditions in mainstream media that are "favorable as well as not favorable to populist positions" (49): 1) Media can circumvent the political system and speak directly to the people, potentially being able to adopt populist attitudes; 2) media exert symbolic power through the representation of the society, describe and prescribe the divisions that are purportedly typical or natural, and can set lines of division clearly functional for populist actors; 3) media's position as a counterweight to power (political and others) makes them prone to assume an anti-institutional stance obviously fit for populist purposes; and 4) media can use rhetorical and stylistic resources that are impossible in official political contexts, echoing populist rhetorical resources as was already mentioned by Moffitt and Peck. As Kramer highlights, these four structural elements of mainstream, legacy or elite news media *may* be used in a populist way, they are useful for populist stances but not populist *per se*.

¹³⁰ This definition has been applied in a number of cases, but it is worth to mention the case of Joseph Pulitzer's populist style (Juergens, 2015) as probably the best representative of this dimension of journalism. See more at <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/joseph-pulitzer-voice-of-the-people-about/11267/>

From that discussion, one might think that other professional rules, such as verification and balancing sources, diversity of voices, context, a catchy peg, an original angle or the famous ‘inverted pyramid’ presentation may also be employable by populist actors or adopted by a populist logic. Here it would be necessary to recall the role of radical or alternative media as a sort of ‘authentic’ representation, tribune or link of the press with the people, the popular culture, the disfranchised, marginalized or underrepresented groups, etc. There is of course a large literature centered around alternative media and its use of basic journalistic rules and norms, most of the times stressing the citizen or participatory value of journalism (Downing, 2001; Guedes, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008), but their implication on disseminating populist messages or supporting populist actors is unclear¹³¹. Atkinson and Leon Berg’s (2012) research on the Tea Party and the ‘narrowmobilization’ function of alternative media in the actual protests and spread of that right-wing movement is one of the few studies exploring that dimension which remains obscure although it seems to play a major role in the Ecuadorean case where populism in power tries to appropriate journalism’s principles and practices to ‘democratize’ and professionalize media.

3.2.- Exchange or competitive symbiosis

¹³¹ The discussion of the relationship between alternative or radical media and populism goes beyond the scope of this study but let’s clarify what can be one interesting contradiction or disagreement between alternative media and populism, that is to say, their preferred audience or target. Alternative media tend to speak to specific populations, social groups or ideologized sectors, whereas populism needs to address the whole society or at least the majority of the population. That niche aspect of alternative media thus makes this format at odds with populism’s transversal and mainstream drive, even if their goals apparently clash, as we see here, with established media logics and institutions.

In sum, Correa's main media actions, here materialized by *Enlace Ciudadano* and media policy, offer contradictory evidence discussing what dominant theories, empirical studies, and public discourses say about the populism-journalism interaction. As seen in *Enlace's* examples and around the spirit and goals of the media reform passed by Correa's government, the populist president was not inherently against news media and journalism; it was mostly a symbolic and material war around norms, practices and concepts associated to media or journalism, a communicational struggle based on power relations that exceeded the existence of isolated logics (politics or populist logics, on the one hand, and media logics, on the other) as we saw in the previous chapter. In Ecuador, mainstream media had (even if they denied it) supported and exerted political goals, besides a peculiar and specific ideological stance, and the government itself acted beyond its symbolic and material field as a veritable media platform. *Enlace* and media policy are the perfect institutional and communicational reflection of that thesis. In this sense, utilizing a basic negative approach about the populism-media relation may be very narrow and not quite based on the real, and complex, interaction between these two phenomena and processes. It may be also problematic to look at this interaction as a subordinated association where one logic commands the other, be it media over populism or vice versa. As we can see in the Ecuadorean case, the reality was conflictive, tense, defined by a communicational struggle that even if achieved a sort of institutional stability, it was far from securing the consensus of several media companies, associations and organizations. Perhaps the strategy that suits better the Ecuadorean reality is the one exploring the possible exchange between media/journalism and populism, represented barely by Mazzoleni and Moffitt, and more

explicitly by Kramer. However, this exchange method may be also deficient since it still seems to understand journalism and politics as two clearly differentiated fields, an approach that may be problematic to describe the reality of the Ecuadorean case. Peck's approach, on the other hand, does reflect on a politicization of media that seems absent in the other theories, making it closer to the overall conclusion emerged from this study by which media's role and behavior in the Ecuadorean case couldn't be understood apolitically.

Yet, the case with *Enlace* and media reform in Ecuador could also animate a conversation about a symbiosis between populism and the media. That is to say, two worlds partially autonomous, would benefit from each other equally. Let's recall the basic definition from the Cambridge Dictionary by which a symbiosis in biology is "a relationship between two types of animals or plant in which each provides for the other the conditions necessary for its continued existence", or more in general, "a relationship between people or organizations that depend on each other equally". In this way, media used populist ideas and Correa, mostly before he was elected president but not only, supposedly to boost their audience ratings using populist rhetoric, and populism used media resources, techniques and norms to push its own goals of appealing to the people and disseminating their objectives. Part of this approach reflects a reality that was actually a sort of exchange or even a symbiosis, but it didn't speak directly of one key aspect that defines the Ecuadorean case from the beginning: the relationship once Correa was the incumbent was basically conflictive, even explosive, as it was perfectly reflected during the 30-S crisis. It was, in any case, a conflictive symbiosis, a fundamental feature which is, in general, at odds with general examinations of what symbiosis means, but consistent with more detailed explanations and

classifications addressing the “persistence of symbioses with costly interactions that incur conflict and cheating” (Douglas, 2007: 853).

To conclude this chapter, let’s emphasize that conflictive drive that, nonetheless, is not fully marked by the difference between two opposed logics. On the contrary, it is possibly the mixing, or better said, the openness of these two logics (politics/populism and media) what makes them potentially conflictive in the Ecuadorean case and possibly in other contexts. It seems, in short, as if journalistic practices and norms could be approached here from very different perspectives. Verifying sources, displaying catchy headlines, the usage of production effects or the presentation of a story adopting a human interest view might function, therefore, as categories capable to be utilized from different political positions producing a field open to different and potentially conflictive interpretations.

That unhindered battlefield produced interesting outcomes such as the fascinating *Enlace Ciudadano* and the reformist drive behind Correa’s media reform which sought literally to end traditional media’s behavior as disguised political actors, but at the same time, it also created problematic monsters, such as the more than possible lack of professional ethics and ideological diversity in mainstream media, and the authoritarian practices in the populist side (such as Supercom’s sanctioning and censoring impetus, or Correa’s insistence on addressing any problem without respecting institutional limits). We will examine this fighting and their offspring more closely in the following chapters drawing from the views of journalist and media policy actors about in their experience under Correa’s media reform era, and from the content analysis on two of the main newspapers in the

country. The outcomes will illustrate more carefully the product of the complex symbiotic battle.

Chapter 4

“Necesitamos regulación”: Press freedom, media policy and the journalistic professionalism

In 2018, an article jointly published by the *Columbia Journalism Review* and the Committee to Protect Journalists (Southwick & Otis, 2018) celebrated “Ecuador's U-Turn Away from Media Repression.” In clear contrast with populist Rafael Correa, the current leader, Lenin Moreno, explained the article, was abandoning the “state of repression” that the previous administration exercised over news media. By the end of their analysis, the authors stated that “there is a path back to press freedom and sustained international pressure can be meaningful. At the same time, it is difficult to overstate the damage that a powerful executive branch determined to destroy independent media can inflict on a country”. The influential publication and the journalists association situated thus the “right of press freedom” (*Ibidem*) at the center of the clash between media and Correa’s populist government. For them, it seemed clear, the major problem that freedom of the press faced was the government’s action and now, with Moreno as president, the main obstacle had disappeared from the stage.

An explicit definition of press freedom was not provided in the article. And this leads us to a central question in this chapter, for the authors assumed an implicit meaning of press freedom in their discussion about Ecuador’s conflictive media system and their harsh critique against Correa’s presidency. For them, press freedom means free independent media making the political power accountable, no more, no less. This conception is usually associated with a negative approach towards press freedom, where the government is seen

as the major threat to the free press. However, in the previous chapters, we questioned whether mainstream media in Ecuador were really ‘independent’ and not animated by political goals and particular interests. Furthermore, as explained before, the 2008 Constitution and Correa’s media reform not only triggered a conversation about controlling or censoring media; these new institutions and policies intended also to ‘democratize’ the public sphere, promoting diverse content, protecting free speech and enforcing deontological codes, besides the creation of controversial figures or agencies such as Supercom. In this chapter, I intend to show how Ecuadoreans actually responded to that complex discussion about press freedom and media reform that ran across Correa’s long presidency; for instance, did Ecuadorian journalists, policy actors and analysts hold the same consensus as the CJR article on what press freedom was and what were its major challenges? What were the kind of discourses about press freedom and media regulation that inspired the people who worked in news media during Correa’s populist presidency? These are some of the questions that the following sections want to answer observing closely the transformation of journalism under Correa’s populist media regime, especially after the passage of the Communication Law in 2013. So, if in the previous pages we examined, applying a wide-angle strategy, how media and the populist president clashed and how the media system was broadly transformed, now the following sections utilize a close-up on Ecuadorean journalism and discussions around regulation and professionalism drawing directly from views of the subjects in the field.

We start this chapter thus with a discussion on press freedom, a complex concept that was situated at the center of the struggle between Correa’s government and the media. The *Columbia Journalism Review*’s article takes for granted a general and shared understanding

of press freedom, but it adopts a negative or libertarian approach. That conception, as solidly established it may be, has not always been embraced historically, and is not totally adopted by a number of journalistic and media cultures around the world, at least once the term is defined in detail. As we will see in this chapter, there are at least two general conceptions about press freedom, equivalent to the classical debate around basic types of freedom. There are negative and positive approaches to press freedom, and negative conceptualizations usually tend to dominate scholarly research and public discussions. We will see in the following pages whether journalists and policy actors in Ecuador supported the same view as the CJR and the CPJ. These views, moreover, are intimately linked also to discussions about what should be the role of the state in regulating (or not) media, and the debate over journalism's role and journalistic professionalism, that allegedly had to be dramatically reduced with Correa in power due to government's repression of media's independence.

As for the relationship between populism and press freedom, their negative association has been already underscored in chapter 3, and many scholars and writers, including the authors of the CJR article, expound a clear disapproval of the Latin American Pink Tide governments for using media regulation to allegedly control critical journalism. This discourse has been usually framed around an argument of populism's problematic clash with the free and independent press. For instance, Kellam and Stein (2016) claim a clear correlation between the rise of those leftist governments in the region and the decrease in free speech and press freedom ratings as they are measured by organizations such as Freedom House¹³² or Reporters Without Borders. However, according to the authors, that

¹³² Freedom House press freedom ratings for Ecuador went from 41 in 2007 when Correa was elected to 66 in 2017, the last year of his presidency, shifting Ecuador from a status of 'Partly Free' to 'Not Free'.

situation was curiously opposed to ‘polity’ ratings measuring the population’s participation in politics in those nations, which increased during the time these leftist leaders were in power. Kellan and Stein adopt a libertarian conception of press freedom, which they define as “an environment in which journalists can report independently of government and with minimal regulation or state intervention” (43). That negative approach seems also quite explicit in their abstract, in which media’s role is focused on holding “democratically elected leaders accountable by exposing corruption and policy failures”. Possibly the contradiction between press freedom ratings and polity scores has to do with the narrowness of the libertarian definition. Kenny (2020) additionally shows in a global study that populist rule seems to be associated with declines in press freedom and this aspect appears particularly intensified in the case of left-wing populism, since these political actors are inclined to intervene in the economy. Kenny defines press freedom as “autonomy of the media from political interference or censorship”, including any “variety of actions taken by a government” (p. 3). As this phrase and its conclusions clearly imply, Kenny follows a basic negative or libertarian conception of press freedom.

However, many views about press freedom expressed by Ecuadorean journalists, analysts or policymakers did not reflect exactly those scholarly approaches and the philosophy behind the article posted by the *Columbian Journalism Review*. Their opinions were polarized on important topics, such as whether press freedom was in danger in Ecuador, but they shared conceptions around media regulation and the development of professionalism under Correa’s presidency that directly contradicted a negative press freedom concept. Most of the subjects interviewed for this study agreed that media

regulation was necessary in Ecuador, held a conception of journalism much more complex than the one represented by the classic watchdog model of controlling the political power, and declared that journalistic professionalism and quality got better under Correa.

Besides presenting and analyzing those findings, this chapter also suggests an evaluation of what this evidence mean for understanding the relationship between populism and the media. This time, the conversation will be centered on the importance of historical conditions to understand the conception of democratic independent media, and about the role of the state in triggering professionalism and independence. It seems incongruous that media professionalism had increased under a populist regime ruled by an aggressive pro-regulatory government, but probably this conflicting finding has to do with a primary misunderstanding, firmly established at a theoretical level: a strange amnesia around the role of the state in building a democratic media, making it difficult to understand the role governments have played and still play in the configuration of media and journalism's limits and potentialities. As we have seen already in the previous chapters and keep observing in the following, Correa's regime had a particular, and sometimes problematic standpoint about the state, but at the end of the day, that view could be defined as a basic positive freedom stance on the law and the role played by the government in the society.

1.- Press freedom and the state: Libertarians and egalitarians

In *Free Speech and Unfree News* (2016) American historian Sam Lebovic, discusses how the modern relationship between media and the state was constituted by a sort of foundational tension in the United States. That problematic relation is illustrated by the

debates in the 1920s and 1930s between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey around the role of the press in a democratic society (2016: 7-36). Lippmann and Dewey, holding positions so distant in many topics, concurred in the idea that just a simple right to press freedom and free speech wasn't enough for the existence of a democratic public opinion (2016: 25-35). Building on that discussion, Lebovic highlights the struggle between a restrictive or "absolutist interpretation" of the United States Constitution First Amendment (64-87) and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal regulatory impetus expanded to the rising powerful mass media in the country. As it is known, during the interwar period, Roosevelt's long presidency presented and implemented unprecedented changes in the American economy, increasing exponentially the role of the government. Institutions such as social security, minimum wage, FDA regulations or progressive taxation were created and implemented in a country that had made the rejection of government intervention almost part of the national essence. As Lebovic recalls, Roosevelt, repudiated by most of the press which defended conservative and anti-New Deal stances, also proposed to reform communications. This reformist drive, which eventually would lead to the 1934 Communications Act, creating among other things the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), would be accompanied by an almost militant opposition by the media to any regulation. They even accused New Dealers of proposing a set of policies that, if applied, could make of the United States a country with "no more free press than (Fascist) Italy" (2016: 68).

In the end, Lebovic stresses –in line with Pickard's thesis (2014) of a victory of 'libertarian corporatism' after the Second World War–, a restrictive interpretation of press freedom remained hegemonic in the country. However, important regulations were imposed

to the communications sector; the so-called “fairness doctrine” was possibly the best representative of a positive conception press freedom in the United States (Pickard, 2018), developed since the 1940s and supported by the United States Supreme Court with the historical *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC* case in 1969, backing the FCC’s ruling against private media. In any case, as Lebovic’s work shows, and the more or less limited regulatory measures adopted after the Second World War indicate, the relationship between the media and the state hadn’t been naturally originated; it mostly had emerged from a particular balance of power in the 1930s and 1940s. And it is very important to recognize that even in the United States, the most permissive country in the developed world on media regulation (Schudson, 2008: 27-39), a debate about the role of the state existed and sparked flames. As we will see, similar tensions occurred in different contexts, and the Ecuadorean case is not an isolated instance. The discussion between a negative and a positive conception of press freedom was actively and vividly implemented during Correa’s presidency as it was in the American case in the 1930s.

As a matter of fact, even if one conception seems to be hegemonic, the relationship between the state and press freedom and free speech, –or more generally, state and media–, has been usually portrayed as a discussion between negative and positive conceptions of press freedom (Glasser and Hunter in Overholser and Jamieson, 2005; Hansen 2015; Koltay, 2015; Pickard, 2017), or in other terms, libertarian and egalitarian perspectives. In a few words, a ‘negative’ approach to press freedom defines this right by the non-interference of any external agent, especially governments or the political power; therefore, this perspective defends a *laissez-faire* point of view on regulation and focuses on individual rights. In

contrast, a ‘positive’, egalitarian or, for some, ‘redistributive’ (Lakier, 2021) perspective to press freedom understands this right as a capacity that can be constrained by other interferences, besides the state, impeding its development and calls for government and legislative intervention to expand the right.

Going a little bit further and transforming those approaches into two distinct ideal types of the relationship between state and news media we could even identify two differentiated models representing the relationship between the state and press freedom: a libertarian view and an egalitarian conception. The libertarian would understand press freedom essentially as a negative liberty and would abhor any legal regulation. For that perspective, any attempt to legislate on news media could be read as an attack on democracy, also defined following that ‘negative’ lens. Here, the market or civil society are the only judges mediating that right, and the independent press emerges basically from that dynamic civil society separated from and even opposed to the state, reflecting, at some extent, Habermas’ primary argument (1989) about the rise of the public sphere at the end of the Eighteenth century and during the first decades of the Nineteenth century in Europe and North America. It is not a coincidence that the First Amendment, written in 1789, supports, in its literality, this approach¹³³.

In contrast, the egalitarian approach would consider a simple principle of non-intervention not enough to fully achieve (and to defend) that freedom. The market and the

¹³³ However, events surrounding the proclamation of the First Amendment in the United States in the late Eighteenth century and the early Nineteenth century, contradict that negative or restrictive reading, at least in what happened to be the role of the state back then, critically supporting media and communications. As Starr has shown (2004) “the creation of the media” in the US was basically a state issue, reflected as such in many media policies, making communications fast, cheap, safe and open to all citizens, or providing the means for the first newspapers to thrive in a pluralist environment.

civil society here are penetrated (or colonized) by strong asymmetries or cleavages (based on class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and by themselves cannot protect or expand the right. Hence the necessity of state intervention to correct or to ease those conflicts. Media regulation therefore is conceived not to control or to censor media's capacities, but as a method of expansion (by subsidizing the press, creating public broadcasters, supporting journalists' professional associations, etc.), correction (by providing spaces for those voices with less power, by representing marginalized communities or minorities, etc.) or defense of the right (for example, by avoiding monopolies or spurious interests reflected on ownership issues and the control of the market). Going back to Habermas' thesis on the emergence of the public sphere in liberal societies, this approach reverses the problem, and the burden of proof, so to speak, moves from the state to the market, once the state seems to work with relative autonomy enforcing what the democratic legislation mandates. Of course, these differences are predated by the classical discussion about negative and positive freedom, where the first one tends to be criticized as insufficient and cynical, and the second one, as prone to authoritarian temptations (Carter, 2019).

If we apply these two basic approaches to modern Western media systems, following Hallin and Mancini's typology (2004) in which the evaluation of the role of the state in the media system is crucial to understand the different configurations among countries¹³⁴, the 'Liberal model', represented in the classification by Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States or, in some facets, the United Kingdom, would be the closer to negative or

¹³⁴ Hallin and Mancini's comparative analysis is based on a complex and multidimensional definition of media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 21-45), by which media systems, or the relations between media and politics, are explained by four components: the structure of media markets, the degree and form of political parallelism, the professionalization of journalism and the role of the state.

libertarian conceptions given their distrust on the government's intervention and the relatively limited media policy in these countries. The United States, in particular, holds a special status as the most libertarian case, since it is the only developed nation without an influential public broadcaster and specific government agencies focused on media, communication and journalism issues, at least since 1987¹³⁵. The 'Polarized Pluralist model', on the other hand, represented by countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece or, at some extent, France, would adopt a more mixed understanding of press freedom, with more state power present in media markets and the public sphere, but still, the model that fits better an egalitarian view on press freedom would be the so-called 'Democratic-Corporatist' system (dominant in Northern and Central European nation-states such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, etc.). This ideal type requires a strong involvement of the state, through well-funded public media and comprehensive regulation; interestingly it shows a clear correlation with a solid welfare state and a high engagement of public administrations in the economy, stressing on other aspects the huge influence of positive freedom conceptions in these societies.

It is also important to add that the role of journalism may be constructed differently, *ideally*, for both types. For a libertarian model journalists would work most of all as watchdogs, noticing and unfolding governments' excesses, as a sort of 'fourth power'. Well-known cases such as the *Pentagon Papers* or the *Watergate* scandal represent that archetype.

¹³⁵ However, recently some voices have addressed the existence of a parallel non-first amendment legislation "much less libertarian and much more redistributive, in what it understands freedom of speech to mean and to require" (Lakier, 2021: 2356), referring to state, local and secondary regulations protecting and enabling access to free speech and communication among the population. In any case, in comparative terms, the American case stands out as the most restrictive case in terms of the government's involvement in media activities; this tendency has been more acute in the last decades (Pickard, 2018).

And, although their role creates ‘political’ outcomes, journalism’s involvement in politics is very contested and the news as a profession is seen as an objective, detached and apolitical perspective¹³⁶. By contrast, an ideal egalitarian model would comprehend journalism’ ideal role as a more general feature, stressing the necessity of a good representation of the society in the public sphere. Here journalists are not only custodians of how public powers are managed, but also a key medium of representation and a vector of education, justice and social consensus. Therefore, it is the media’s responsibility to reflect the society (represented, at the same time, by political parties, social organizations, social movements, etc.) and to educate individuals for the sake of a democratic society, where, in principle, everybody’s voice must be heard. The archetype here might be observed in public broadcasting associated with inclusiveness, education and plurality; British BBC, Danish DR, German ZDF or Norway’s NRK may represent this model. Of course, these are two ideal types with no pure real life representations. Even in the most libertarian countries, such as the United States, egalitarian advocates problematize the hegemonic approach, as Lebovic perfectly recalls from the New Deal years, or as Senator Bernie Sanders exposed recently in an ‘exceptional’¹³⁷ op-ed at CJR in 2019. And neoliberalism, as we will see in the next paragraphs, has had an effect in the most interventionist countries from Northern

¹³⁶ As Doris A. Graber perfectly summarizes, “when issues are put on the crowded political agenda, should their newsworthiness be the controlling factor? If the answer is no, then widespread participation by the media in policy making may be quite troubling” (Graber, 1984: 154).

¹³⁷ The adjective ‘exceptional’ tries to stress that Sanders’ opinion article at CJR is an isolated political proposal amid the silent discussion on media regulation in the United States. His proposals are informed by a basic egalitarian approach, introducing the need to legislate against media oligopolies, reforming the 1996 Telecommunications Act, and increasing funding for public media in the US by taxing technological platforms. See more at <https://www.cjr.org/opinion/bernie-sanders-media-silicon-valley.php>

Europe, opening up media markets and increasing exposure and competence with commercial media in those models.

1.2.- Neoliberalism and Latin America

With all these considerations in mind, it may be easier to determine that the authors of article that introduces this chapter are supporting a solidly American libertarian approach adapted to the Ecuadorean reality. Some Ecuadorian actors, as we will show later, embraced this stance, a very powerful discourse, especially in the last four decades. The libertarian approach seems to have been the norm among nation-states, influential political actors, international organizations, large news media corporations and mighty international non-governmental organizations especially since the 1970s and 1980s, supporting the idea of a sort of post-national or post-state international convergence of media (Flew et al, 2016). Some scholars (Bourdieu, 1996; Feintuck, Varney, 2006; Horwitz, 2005; McChesney, 2008; Hallin and Mancini in Esser et al, 2008; Dawes, 2017) call this a ‘neoliberal’ tendency or an ‘americanization’ trend favoring non-intervention, liberalization, privatization, and deregulation of media and communications, which replaced the more positive and redistributive Post-war “paradigm” (Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003) that influenced most media systems. Additionally, the rise and expansion of the Internet, which was welcomed with initial euphoria as a vector of democratization, has adopted progressively an overwhelming neoliberal commercial logic (McChesney, 2013), merged with data personalization, surveillance (Lyon, 2019) and geopolitical (Aouragh and Chakravartty, 2016) facets. Almost logically, new media firms and giant technological media platforms

malgré soi (from Twitter to Google or Facebook, these companies often refuse to be considered themselves as media corporations) embrace a clear libertarian approach, encouraged by their global reach to refuse any government regulation, from content to markets intervention, besides evading national tax offices.

Most Latin American countries have been recently following that libertarian norm, even in its most extreme form (Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Segura and Waisbord, 2016), at least until the first decade of the twenty first century¹³⁸. In the 1980s and 1990s, the region's media systems experienced processes of privatization and liberalization that "largely benefited concentrated private interests at the expense of wider political and social goals" (Fox and Waisbord, 2002, p.xxi). Even the most regulated nations in the region such as Chile, adopted neoliberal policies aggressively, abandoning the scarce options of public service media and harming the alternative media that had emerged in the previous decades (Porto, 2016, p.3). Converging on the same path, after a Post-Second World War era in which the state had played an important role during the phase of 'import substitution industrialization', governments were pulled back from the economy, leaving private actors, such as national or international corporations, the command of the national economy. Ecuador was not an exception to this rule.

¹³⁸ Cases of non-Western countries like China, some Arab nations or even Russia nowadays, might provide an interesting exemption to the rule and further research is needed to fully comprehend the institutional dimension of journalism in those countries. Yet, in places where concepts as 'liberal democracy' or 'press freedom' work almost as foreign signifiers, and where civil and individual liberties have a very difficult materialization, the libertarian approach meets a necessary nemesis, and not a controversial opponent. However, in cases such as Russia, the more or less inspired application of a libertarian conceptualization and its associated policies (under the form of a total de-regulation and liberalization of media) has been fully analyzed by Natalia Roudakova's ethnographic work on Russian journalism transformation right after the fall of the USSR (2017). Her conclusions (professionalization decline, erosion of truth and the discredit of the press) might sound quite familiar to those more informed about Latin American media systems.

However, during what Correa and the Latin American Pink Tide governments nicknamed the “larga noche neoliberal”, some media reform activists and social movements were active in the region (Porto, 2012; Soledad Segura & Waisbord, 2016) suggesting very different goals and policies than those implemented by the hegemonic ideas. As we highlighted in the introductory chapter, some alternative and community media had a significant impact in Ecuador, as some organizations and movements supported a different understanding of popular culture, where the relationship between *el pueblo* and the media was the focus point. Martín-Barbero’s *De los medios a las mediaciones*, a very important scholarly contribution to understand the role of media and its intersection with popular culture in the region, was published in Bogotá in 1987, possibly at the beginning of the neoliberal *momentum* in Latin America. The continuing existence of public institutions such as Ciespal in Ecuador, supporting alternative media logics, or the spread of community radios in many rural and indigenous areas in countries such as Colombia or Ecuador, speak also about an eccentric reality that supported views and policies closer to positive freedom stances towards media regulation.

But the libertarian approach remained strongly hegemonic in Latin America, possibly also because public service options and interventionist policies had been very scarce in the region in the more regulatory friendly 1950s and 1960s (Porto, pp. 2-4, 2016) or they adopted the form of authoritarian state policies, prone to clientelist practices (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). The neoliberal turn, furthermore, coincided with regional democratization processes in the 1980s, and only part of the new liberalization/privatization formula was actually functioning. As explained above, the libertarian concept assumes the

existence and action of independent media, once the main limitation, that is to say, government's intervention and menace, is removed. But as Soledad Segura and Silvio Waisbord explain (2016), the regional experience until the first years of 2000s, characterized by a "free market competition" mantra, endlessly repeated by national and regional media business associations" (2016, 33), was never nuanced by the reality of what they call "pervasive patrimonialism", or a state-media relationship defined by informal agreements among elites (in form of opaque public concessions, indirect funding via monopolistic or oligopolistic control of media markets, etc.) very far from that idealistic "free market competition". It was, therefore, a situation of 'Captured-Liberal' media systems (Guerrero and Marquez, 2014), where a liberal *façade* was anchored in a distorted market competition, where monopolistic or oligopolistic situations were the norm and professional practices were very often neglected. On top of that, the lack of associationism among journalists, precarious labor conditions (reporters were very often forced to secure a part of the advertising investment in the media outlet to receive a decent payment) and the marginalization of large percentages of the population, made journalistic professionalism very weak and created a very narrow and distorted social and cultural representation in the media system.

The Ecuadorean case fit perfectly into that general picture for the region. As we saw in previous chapters, Ecuador didn't have any public media before Correa came to power, save Radio Nacional del Ecuador, which frequency was inactive before the creation of Radio Pública del Ecuador in 2008. The basic legal framework in the country was a law passed during the military juntas in 1975 that regulated television and radio broadcasting, reformed in 1995 (with provisions which restricted dramatically the creation of community media)

and 2002 (repealing those provisions). Regarding media markets, Ecuador presented a fragmented environment which, on the other hand, suffered from oligopolistic tendencies. A handful of families controlled major newspapers, (*El Comercio, El Universo, La Hora, Expreso* and *Extra*) and two powerful financial actors owned very influential television broadcasters (the Egas conglomerate and the Isaias group); only one pure media group (without other prevalent economic interests) operated a television broadcaster (*Ecuavisa*). Institutional advertising from the state allotted without any accountability was common, besides a number of subsidies or fiscal privileges creating unclear boundaries between the government and the press. Several professional associations formally existed, but their activity was almost fictitious; not a single journalist interviewed by this study belonged to any of the associations registered in the country. It was quite usual that many journalists didn't hold a higher education degree and plans for a professional statute for journalism and the conception of a national school of journalism, disseminated during the military juntas in the 1970s, were abandoned. However, as happened in other Latin American nations, media reform movements were active in the country, pushing for the creation of public broadcasting or for subsidizing and supporting existing and new community media. The 2002 reform and laboratories like Radio La Luna illustrate this point, but until Rafael Correa's presidency little of these movements' ideas was put into practice. Let's recall that until Correa's government increasing preoccupation with communication issues, media policy and allegedly positive approaches towards media regulation and press freedom weren't clearly presented before the majority of the Ecuadorean public opinion. As we saw in the previous chapters, the media issue was set in the national agenda as an important

subject *after* Correa came to power. In sum, and assuming important reservations regarding those obscure links between the government and media involving broadcasting allocations or institutional advertising, Ecuador presented formal features of a libertarian country, at least around issues on media regulation and press freedom. However, as we will see in the following pages, this is not what emerged in conversations with journalists and media actors in the field.

2.- What the Ecuadoreans say: the need of regulation

To explore the impact of Correa's media reform and the implications of discussions about press freedom in the Ecuadorean populist context, in-depth interviews were held with those more involved in the process: local journalists, policymakers and analysts with knowledge and substantial presence in the public debate. As it is explained more in detail in the methods section of the introductory chapter, most of them, 20, were news media professionals from different ranks (editors, publishers and reporters), adding media actors with influence in the policy process, 3, and analysts, 7, with presence in the public sphere able to provide an informed view about the topic. This section and the following segments are basically made out of their responses to in-depth interviews in 2017 and 2018. Their views, synthesized using a discourse tracing technique depending on subject's position on key questions (such as if they considered that media must be regulated, their support or rejection of public media, or whether they thought that journalism had improved in the country), were complex and quite opposed to what many would expect from the Ecuadorean conditions.

As discussed above, the main characteristics of Latin American media systems implied essentially that the ‘normal’ media model was one based on a hegemonic commercial logic ruled by a network of interests shared among media companies, businesses, and political elites, with a formal distinction between deregulated media markets and the government. There was also widespread criticism around Correa’s media policy among scholars and public discussions based usually on specific cases of alleged self-censorship triggered by government agencies over journalists; furthermore, there was evidence of real economic and legal concerns among media owners, publishers and editors, if they didn’t surrender to Correa’s government political goals. In a few words, media regulation in general appeared to be alien to Ecuador’s history, or even came into view as a sort of hideous experiment in a land that was not favorable to state intervention in media.

With all this in mind, I expected to find one of two scenarios in the interviews with journalists and media policy actors: a) a resilient common sense among most of the respondents supporting a libertarian approach on freedom of the press and media regulation; or b) a highly polarized landscape where libertarian and egalitarian views collided representing two political camps, that is to say, pro-regulatory *oficialistas* or Correa supporters versus the opposition parties’ adherents merged with mainstream private media rejecting regulation. I expected also to find those scenarios for other key discussions, as the debate about the role of public broadcasting, and the situation of journalism (its improvement or not) in the country during Correa’s populist regime. Finally, and associated to those discourses, I expected to see a hegemonic view based on the watchdog function, or at least a polarized discussion around journalism’s role. Yet, views reflected in subjects’ responses

to questions about media regulation, journalism's role, and professionalism, produced a very different picture from the assumption that a sort of libertarian common sense was easily established among journalist and policy actors.

Only nine individuals out of 30 rejected media regulation, in contrast with a majority of subjects who supported the need to regulate what they saw as a problematic media system even before Correa came to power. This, obviously, could be seen as a striking result in a nation that had been dominated by private media without any substantial regulation for decades, save the authoritarian period of the military juntas in the 1970s. Respondents who positioned themselves against regulation preferred some sort of self-regulation, although four of them hesitated about the role of the state. These four individuals acknowledged the need of regulation but opted for self-regulation because of distrust of government's behavior. In addition to that, the profiles of these 9 respondents may tell us something about the identity of those backing self-regulation, and allegedly a libertarian approach. All worked in private media and one of them, Mauricio Alarcón, was employed in Fundamedios, the non-governmental organization created in December 2007 to protect the rights of Ecuadorean journalists and very critical of Correa's government; three of them were foreigners (two Spaniards and one Venezuelan); and all of them held managerial positions within their respective organizations, as editors-in-chief or publishers. It is important to notice that many of them confirmed a failure of self-regulation in the years before Correa took power:

So, before this (Correa's) government there was a press with excesses, with mistakes, as with all the world's press. I believe that it was a press whose major sin was not to have created self-regulation processes. I think that if self-regulation processes had been generated the later clash [with the

government] would have been more difficult regarding the public opinion battle. (Luis Vivanco, *La Posta*)

You know what? I don't know. It is a dilemma that I have, but I believe very much in self-regulation. That is to say, there are things I don't like, and I do see... There are some journalists who are very... they have, also, converted themselves into political actors, but at the same time it is a path you choose. (Anonymous, private media)

I don't know what to tell you: There are media that need regulation, that are weakly professionalized, that play games a little bit... I think it could be convenient, but between convenience and the decision on a norm, I think there's a thing that's very... a line I don't know if I would cross. (Sara España, *Expreso*)

As we see in these excerpts, there is an implicit and explicit critical assessment of media, even up to the point of acknowledging the necessity of some sort of regulation by a majority of the respondents. This clause can actually summarize the consensus among the actors: either in the case of fiercely pro-Correa individuals or in the case of anti-Correa respondents, the vast majority of journalists and media policy actors suggested that regulation was needed. For instance, according to one reporter employed by *El Universo*, one of the newspapers most often punished by Supercom and attacked by Rafael Correa:

I think the Communication Law was needed; it is a necessity to regulate media in Ecuador due to the background information I told you. But Correa manipulated the law . . . He created a custom-made law with sanctioning and regulatory bodies (Ricardo Zambrano, *El Universo*)

A reporter of *Ecuavisa*, highly critical towards Correa's government, pointed out similar views:

I want to think it was necessary. I agree with a Cordicom . . . Cordicom's job was a work mostly related to generate supply to improve information. To apply the Communication Law to improve, as to not to put specific shows on children's time slots, etc... And if suddenly a reporter makes a mistake, because he didn't do his job, didn't handle the best way, you were a little bit discriminatory regarding this social group, that Ecuadorian nationality... Perfect! That's ok! But then the Superintendencia starts sanctioning us. Here there is this struggle between private media and the State. (Juan Carlos Aizprúa, *Ecuavisa*)

On the other hand, policy-makers, politicians and journalists working for the public media, strongly supported regulation, stressing the bad shape of media before Correa took power:

Eight families owned 80% of media and this obviously generated a media matrix towards specific topics, towards a specific economic model. When the possibility of a Communication Law is introduced, what they say is that the best law is no law at all because media self-regulate... I say that there's no power in the world able to self-regulate! (Carlos Ochoa, Supercom)

However, once that necessity was validated and explained, journalists (working either for public or private media) highlighted negative outcomes from that regulation, focusing especially on the Supercom's role, the sanctioning institution introduced in the law. Orlando Pérez, a popular leftist Ecuadorean journalist, editor-in-chief of *El Telégrafo* between 2012 and 2017, and working as a host for Venezuela based transnational broadcaster Telesur when he was interviewed in 2018, hesitated before Supercom's sanctioning power:

What I don't like is that thing of the process of sanctioning. It is not clear, is confusing. I don't know about law, and since there's no experience in the world on sanctioning media... Some say that it is better the civil justice

to do that. So, it is a business that is not entirely clear to me. (Orlando Pérez, *El Telégrafo* and *Telesur*)

It has to be stressed that reporters from *Expreso*, *El Telégrafo*, *El Universo*, *Ecuavisa*, *La Posta* and many analysts criticized Supercom's role in the regulation process. No matter what ideological approach (left, right, pro-government, anti-government) was at stake, there was a sort of general accusation. Only politicians and policy-makers (Carlos Ochoa, Fernando Alvarado and Patricio Barriga) omitted that view.

In addition to those shared views on regulation, we should add the universal recognition of public broadcasting's value to improve Ecuador's public sphere. All the interviewees supported the introduction of public media by Correa in 2007 and 2008. Yet, few of them defended the actual operation of public media, including television, radio and the press. Again, only politicians and one journalist (an anonymous respondent, working in a government agency) endorsed public media's management without major criticism, although they tended to concede palliative remarks on something that "was completely new in the country" (Fernando Alvarado interview). Anyhow, most of the interviewees confirmed a blatant partisan use of public media. Statements by journalists from public and private media agreed in their critiques of a biased public media, though they sometimes slightly differed on the role or the logic of public media. British BBC was very often the example at hand:

In an ideal situation public media shouldn't have any connection with current governments, but right now they have. Nor should people expect public media to make a profit. I think the BBC is funded by a tax. (Xavier Letamendi, *El Telégrafo*)

What they have to do, if they have a public broadcaster, is to reform the law and shield that medium. Remove the political weight from those programs and let it work as a public broadcaster. If what they want is a medium for the party in the government, let's put that broadcaster to compete in the market and let's see how many consumers it can get, since I don't think Ecuadorians would like to pay a service for [Correa's] party. (Anderson Boscan, *La Posta*)

Here we see several discourses. First, there was at the same time the universal acclaim, and an ideal type at hand (British BBC), working together with a critical approach that varied depending on the respondent. In addition to that, most of the participants pointed out funding as a major problem for public media's independence, and many of them – journalists working in public media, politicians and analysts but also reporters employed by private media– suggested a different logic for public broadcasting, beyond private broadcasters' commercial goals:

Without public media, whose aim is not commercial profit but to serve to citizenship, who is going to do it? Whether I'm Correista or Leninista [referring to Correa's successor] doesn't matter, it falls to a second place, my duty is to respond to citizenship in a context of a state that recognizes specific rights. (Giovanna Tassi, *Radio Pública del Ecuador*)

From my viewpoint, public media are that: they must offer a public service much wider than our services [in private broadcasting]. They must go further and quickly to investigate, I don't know, how that government's nutrition program has benefited the population... (Juan Carlos Aizprúa, *Ecuavisa*)

In any case, it is very meaningful that two thirds of the interviewees supported regulation on media along with a total agreement on the existence of public media. Furthermore, participants gave examples of what a *good* public media would look like and

acknowledged a different logic for public broadcasting. All these discourses on regulation and public broadcasting are clearly very far from the usual libertarian approach towards media; on the contrary, they seemed to support a positive or 'redistributive' state intervention in media, although they were aware of the actual problematic implementation in the Ecuadorean case.

3.- Perspectives on press freedom and polarization

The question of whether press freedom was in danger during Correa's years was central in the way his presidency was framed. We have already observed discussions on free speech or press freedom in previous analyses of clashes between the populist president and mainstream media, the assessment of media policy or actions such as *Enlace Ciudadano* (which presented a segment titled "Free Speech for All"). However, the confirmation that press freedom was at risk collected a narrow majority of the views among the sample of journalists and policy actors who participated in this study. There were sixteen subjects out of the 30 participants who considered that press freedom was at risk or didn't even exist in Ecuador with Rafael Correa in power, especially after the Communication Law was passed in 2013. In contrast, fourteen of the respondents denied those assumptions or put them into perspective. In the first group, there were analysts, a political advisor, and journalists employed by private and public media; the second group, included politicians, analysts, and journalists working in public media. Only one reporter working for a private newspaper rejected an "explicit" risk to freedom of the press, seeing mostly an "implicit" danger;

nevertheless, this same reporter denied any self-censorship in his work, which points out an inconsistency in his discourse.

Most of the respondents who suggested that freedom of the press was at risk associated the problem with self-censorship stimulated by the government. There was also a general sensation of lack of liberty for journalists and a sensation of fear. For instance, a political adviser, an editor-in-chief working for private media, and an editor employed by the public radio shared similar experiences and views on what happened under Correa's populist regime:

With any colleague you talk to, or with managers, or shareholders, they would have conflicting interests, but they agree; both those in the street or high executives concur that they were really coerced by the political power and colleagues practiced a brutal self-censorship because there were consequences. There are still journalists working in the politics section that don't have access to public institutions; they couldn't have access even physically, which gives you an idea of how the situation has been (José Alonso, political adviser)

I think the law has generated a great deal of fear among private media owners because, hailed by the government, many citizens have initiated legal proceedings against media (Arturo Torres, *El Comercio*)

I think that it was at risk, but not to the extent as it was under Febres Cordero's [1984-8] government. It was an exercise of symbolic violence by which many of us remained silent because of fear...

Q: Fear of sanctions?

Not only fear of sanctions, but also fear of trials, fear of a justice system that wasn't going to offer a fair sentence, fear of retaliation, fear of losing one's job, fear... You are mainly subjected to what is called symbolic violence (*Raquel Escobar, Radio Pública*)

Fear and self-censorship were thus a common denominator, according to these participants, no matter whether they agreed or disagreed on the need of regulation or their general view on journalism and politics. Arturo Torres, former editor-in-chief of *El Comercio* had a very different background compared to José Alonso, a Spaniard political adviser who worked as a journalist in Spain before helping Correa to win the 2007 presidential election and at the time of the interview had worked for Lenin Moreno's government; Raquel Escobar, in turn, had a position at the public radio broadcaster, defined herself as a leftist and had worked for community media in the past. Many of them had management positions, but there were also reporters within that group that alerted of risks for press freedom; and they worked either in the private or the public sector. In sum, the picture seemed quite transversal, although there was a trait that also made an interesting difference inside this group: the assumption of problems concerning press freedom *before* Correa's presidency. Four of those respondents pointed out that press freedom had been at risk several times, and that Correa was not so different from other presidents of Ecuador; for instance, Raquel Escobar recalled Febres-Cordero's government repressive actions over media in the 1980s.

That said, fourteen interviewees didn't agree that press freedom was at risk during the last decade. Some of them basically rejected any risk and even argued that there was an increase of pluralism in the media system. Others acknowledged some risks but in a similar way of previous experiences, claiming that either press freedom had been always problematic or that it had never been fully experienced:

We reached the point in this country where left parties weren't allowed to advertise their propaganda even if they were paying for it. In addition to that, and before the election term began, media, by this I mean power groups, created an agenda by which there were two candidacies always linked to the same groups. . . There were two types of censorship: personal and economic censorship. Media were linked . . . to banks, car distributors, insurance companies; that is to say, it was one 'web' that used media as spearhead to generate political pressure or support. (Carlos Ochoa, Supercom)

There was censorship within private media; one had to agree with specific agendas. When I was working at *Hoy* newspaper. . . [Ecuador] was negotiating a bilateral treaty with the United States in 1996-97. Inside that treaty, in the small print, there was this issue about patented bio-organisms with plant genome or something like that. . . This is a topic I deal with very often . . . and I published a list of articles questioning . . . One day, the editor-in-chief told me, "Giovanna this is not going out" –that simple– . . . because we had to sign that treaty with the US. (Giovanna Tassi, *Radio Pública del Ecuador*)

I don't know if there was any press freedom before. There was always the stress . . . there was always that limitation to show everything 100%. With Correa we saw that there was that divide. Private media had access to political opposition and public media to government's sources. And there was more room for denunciation with Correa. (Anonymous, public media.)

It is important to remind, however, that no journalist from any private media thought that press freedom was not at risk. An overwhelming condemnation of Supercom's operation, based mostly on the arbitrariness of sanctions and its effects on self-censorship, supported that logical outcome. The refusal to confirm risks to press freedom had to do probably with a certain degree of political parallelism between some journalists and Correa's government, as the insistence of having experienced a "dictatorship" during Correa's presidency had to do with some political parallelism with the opposition to the populist president. Negative responses from policy makers and officials were, of course, consistent as well. It is also very interesting to notice that this political parallelism was not developed

between specific political parties (and their associated ideologies) and some private media, but between the government (and its associated public/governmental media) and some journalists, on the one hand, and a wide and unstructured political opposition (with several ideological positions, at least formally) with mainstream media and some journalists, on the other. In the next chapter we will see that it was certainly Correa himself, his political figure and his closest allies, who was the main cleavage in the country, dividing the media field between those supporting Correa and those against the populist leader.

3.1.- The case of Right of Reply and Rectification

Another specific case that emerged in many conversations in which that special polarization was quite well reflected was the use of the right of reply and rectifications during Correa's presidency. Two positions arose around this legal concept: one represented mostly by those working in private media and distanced from Correa's standpoints, who claimed that the government was utilizing these rights to restrict journalists' freedom and capacity, and another represented by journalists and analysts working in or close to the public sector, who defended the value of those new rights to increase diversity, pluralism and accountability in news media. These rights of reply and rectification represented a positive concept towards press freedom and regulation, and they were introduced in the 2008 Constitution. The Communication Law in 2013 specified the cases and application for those legal concepts, for which the newborn Supercom played an important role in their implementation. Most denunciations of censorship, harassment, or incitement to self-

ensorship, were centered around the role of Supercom, directed by Carlos Ochoa, a former journalist, close to Correa.

These legal *dispositifs*, however, are very common in European media regulation. Widely recognized by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Union legal apparatus (Koltay, 2013), they have a long tradition in Nordic and Central European countries, but are also used in Southern Europe; for instance, the right of reply was recognized in Spain in 1984, although hasn't been much used (Pérez Oliva, 2016). A very meaningful case to observe how a positive approach towards press freedom works in real instances, the right of reply was abandoned in the United States in 1987 along with the so-called 'fairness doctrine', which also introduced guidance on broadcasting news content (mostly to include voices and to ensure a fair representation in controversial debates) in American media regulation (Pickard, 2018). Possibly aligning media's legal framework with the neoliberal *zeitgeist* of Ronald Reagan's United States, the right of reply's repeal, shows how nations moved from different contexts towards the libertarian common sense that still dominates discussions about media and press freedom today.

In Ecuador, however, the use of that legal concept became highly controversial since the right of reply was frequently adopted by the government (by the ruling party or by any public agency or institution) to allegedly impose *oficialista* views on news content. A detailed sample of some of the most striking cases is available at Fundamedios's website¹³⁹, and according to many interviewees, the implementation of these legal concepts not only functioned as challenges or direct replies on news articles, but also worked as a powerful

¹³⁹ Details about these cases can be seen at <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/pedidos-de-rectificacion-y-replica-el-mecanismo-favorito-de-los-funcionarios-estatales-para-imponer-su-verdad/>

tool to promote self-censorship. Basically, according to them, Supercom (as any other government agency, company, association, or Ecuadorean citizen) asked for a rectification or a reply *ex officio* or on behalf of some actor, if a specific piece of information was considered false or harmed the complainant rights of honor and reputation; next, the Supercom sent a notification and on many occasions their version of the news already produced to be published, even using the design displayed by the newspaper. This process took weeks or days, depending on the issue, and required the media outlet to save space for these rectifications. Many times, the concerned medium refused to publish the story in the exact terms proposed by Supercom, and the agency menaced (or even imposed) economic sanctions. In June 2015, for instance, *El Universo* was penalized with a fine of 350,000 dollars for not reproducing the reply provided by Supercom (see figure 1), and similar cases were underscored by Fundamedios in that year. Although no type of previous control was established of the content published, the detailed scrutiny by Supercom and the possibility of replies and rectifications boosted self-censorship, many of the subjects interviewed claimed.

CASO 2

Esta réplica fue recibida por el Diario el 17 de abril del 2015 (un día después de ser solicitada)

PORTADA

ORIGINAL

(publicada el 22 de marzo del 2015)

The image shows the front page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'Deuda estatal por \$ 1.700 millones afecta al sistema de salud del IESS'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'HA SEGUIDO CRECIENDO EL FONDO DE LIQUIDEZ DE UNOS 9 MIL MILLONES'. The page features a large number '1.800' and several columns of text.

PÁGINA INTERIOR

INFORME

Deuda del Estado con el IESS incide en prestación de salud

The image shows an interior page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'Deuda del Estado con el IESS incide en prestación de salud'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'El fondo de liquidez crece a 9 mil millones'. The page features a large number '1.800' and several columns of text, including a bar chart.

RÉPLICA

(publicada el 19 de abril del 2015)

The image shows the front page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'Secom pide réplica para el ministro Patricio Rivera, respecto al IESS'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'ES UN ANÁLISIS PROFESIONAL QUE DEBE SER RESPUESTA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN'. The page features a large number '1.800' and several columns of text.

INFORME

Réplica del ministro Patricio Rivera sobre el IESS pedida por la Secom

The image shows an interior page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'Réplica del ministro Patricio Rivera sobre el IESS pedida por la Secom'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'El ministro Rivera responde a las críticas de la Secom'. The page features a large number '1.800' and several columns of text.

RÉPLICA TAL COMO PRETENDÍA LA SECOM QUE SE PUBLIQUE

(solicitada el 16 de abril del 2015)

The image shows the front page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'El IESS ha progresado y mejorará aún más en los próximos años'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'ENTRE 2007 Y 2014 LOS PENSIONISTAS DE VEJEZ INCREMENTARON SU RENTA EN CUATRO MIL DÓLARES'. The page features a large number '4.857' and several columns of text.

INFORME

El IESS ha progresado y mejorará aún más en los próximos años

The image shows an interior page of the newspaper 'EL UNIVERSO'. The main headline is 'El IESS ha progresado y mejorará aún más en los próximos años'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline 'Entre 2007 y 2014 los pensionistas de vejez incrementaron su renta en cuatro mil dólares'. The page features a large number '4.857' and several columns of text.

Figure 4.1: Examples of rectifications (Source: Fundamedios)

Nonetheless, there are not data available about the number of replies and rectifications demanded by Supercom, or other governmental agencies or departments during Correa's presidency, and it is difficult to estimate the percentage of content challenged by Supercom and other *oficialista* actors. The content analysis ran by this research for years 2015 and 2016 in *El Universo* and *El Comercio*, with content randomly retrieved from 'Politics', 'Society/Ecuador' and 'Opinion' sections, only found three rectifications posted at the end of each article, as a sort of subsidiary amendment with additional comments from the newsroom responding to those issues raised by the rectification, without changing the actual content of the story. The actors behind those rectifications were Centro Nacional Electoral (the agency regulating elections), a representative from Alianza País, the ruling party (responding with personal health issues to accusations of absence from parliamentary work) and the agency controlling immigration about a story denouncing the institution's actions against the partner of one important political activist. Not a single reply emerged during those years.

In in-depth interviews, however, those journalists working for private media saw rectifications and replies as part of a plan to control journalism and to induce self-censorship. In contrast, journalists employed in public media claimed that they were resources that worked as a sort of balancing power, even if they endorsed the criticism of Supercom's arbitrariness on their implementation:

You have a government's agency that sanctions media and has its eyes on anything they do; as an example, there is the subject of replies and rectifications which is the most sophisticated way of generating self-censorship. How? At the ownership's level as well as at the journalists' level,

you published a story, you verified your sources, which was what we always did, but what the government used to do, automatically, was to not provide their own version. They knew that as they were not included in the story, because they didn't want to be included, they kept the right of sending you a reply that you were forced to publish. (Arturo Torres, *El Comercio*)

[With Correa] there was a control, but media published and had free will to publish whatever they wanted; there was the possibility to enforce the law or to ask for a rectification. Now [with Correa out of the government], that is gone. Now data are hidden, realities are hidden to the benefit of and the convenience of others. And all that smells of Correa, or his followers, is invisible. There is not balance. If before there was a weak balance because things the political power didn't like were published, now there is not even that. (Anonymous, public media)

To conclude, it was the state of press freedom that clearly generated a polarizing divide, besides the discussion around new legal concepts such as the right of reply and rectifications, and not media regulation or state intervention. Populist Correa, as a political figure, seemed to excite also polarizing views among journalists or any media policy actors, as was recalled by the reporter quoted above, and probably among Ecuadorean citizens as we will see later. But, beyond Correismo and symbolic or material clashes around press freedom, it was surprising that even the condition and evolution of journalistic professionalism during the populist regime didn't create a sharp schism or cleavage among journalists and policy actors as we will see in the next section. The complex transformation of Ecuadorean journalism also gathered striking although nuanced shared views on professionalism.

4.- Evolution of journalistic professionalism, beyond the watchdog model

Another unexpected and highly significant finding was the situation, evolution, and conception of journalism in Ecuador according to many of the respondents, even though some of these features have a logical resonance with the previous findings. What journalism meant for the participants, and how the profession evolved in the last decade under Correa suggested interesting agreements and also contradicted libertarian assumptions. This chapter aimed to explore, in the field, the premise that good journalism is identified with a professional and autonomous activity, related to a set of practices (difference between opinion and information, verified sources, different versions of the story, a shared writing style, etc.), and a detached position regarding particular interests, including political objectives that can focus or go beyond controlling the state power. Following that logic, I expected strong negative responses about the state of professional journalism under Correa, or a clear polarization between media actors, and I anticipated that journalism, especially for those working in mainstream private media, had gotten worse after years of clashes and politicization. However, two very interesting discourses challenged those presumptions: firstly, there was a strong consensus about the ideal role of journalism that exceeded the so-called ‘watchdog model’, and, secondly, a surprising and complex understanding about a favorable evolution of journalism in the last decade was shared by the majority of the subjects.

Firstly, most Ecuadorian journalists and media actors didn’t see journalism just as a fourth power, or a watchdog, controlling the political power. Twenty-two out of thirty participants defined the ideal role of journalism as something else than just an institution making the government and politicians accountable. Two contrasting responses from

journalists working for private media (both of them very critical towards Correa), may perhaps elucidate that counter-intuitive result. While the first quote defines journalism beyond the watchdog type, the second one situates journalism closer to the libertarian model:

I have always believed that a more aggressive press is needed to make government's policies accountable to the detail. But I think the press must also provide solutions. In an ideal society the press should be able to define which are the problems and how to manage them with solutions. That, on the one hand; on the other, they should serve as a real space for debate and not [a space serving as a] . . . megaphone of political factions. (Anderson Boscan, *La Posta*)

[As a journalist] you have to respond for what you do, facing who is in front of you. Respecting the justice but accompanied by due process. The problem in Ecuador is that we don't have due process. . . But you have to fight and there are risks you have to take. Is that ok? No, but that's not going to change. Power always will declare itself persecuted by the Press and it's going to say that journalists want to screw it. And many will say that their [journalists'] job is to screw the government and not another thing. (Juan Carlos Calderón, *4 Pelagatos*, independent journalist)

As we can see, in the first response there was the corroboration of that primary watchdog function, but the journalist introduced more aspects, facets or dimensions. In the second one, in contrast, the more emotionally charged statements framed journalist's work as a risky business seeking the truth about the government and presenting journalism and governments as a sort of arch-enemies. Other respondents posited the ideal role of journalism in a more elaborated and sometimes radical way:

We have to fulfill the job they taught us at the university. [Journalists'] role is not just to inform, but also to educate. All those roles have to be fulfilled, because if we only present products just for entertainment, we don't educate, we don't guide. . . If we present all that, then

we can say that we are making a better informed society, well oriented, well educated, and with entertainment, but healthy (Anonymous, *El Telégrafo*)

We are a fourth power. . . We are not here putting or removing governments, but sometimes it works. This is not like the courts where you wait for the case to be resolved, and you go for the case. What is happening must be told, and if someone is watching you, you are going to behave better (Sara España, *Expreso*)

You are not going to like what I'm going to tell you! For me, private media shouldn't exist. . . Like drinking water, education or health, information should be a public good. In private hands, six persons could manage information in Ecuador, and no editor could publish anything that bothers these persons. So, in my opinion, information is so important that it shouldn't be a business; it must be pure, without economic interest (Fernando Alvarado, former Communications Secretary)

In these three fragments we clearly observe the two basic models we underlined above in the theoretical sections, including a more radical vision, which even exceeded egalitarian common stances. In this way, the second response totally supported the watchdog function, whereas the first discourse elaborated on a more classical role of public broadcasting where education, alongside with information, plays a central purpose. The last fragment though, uttered by the most powerful politician in communication and media affairs under Correa's presidency, introduced a radical view, challenging how an egalitarian ideal type would look like in the academy (Curran, 2003, p. 289). For him, in an ideal situation, information, and in consequence the press, should be a public good; or in a more populist way, information must be owned by the people, and not by private companies. So, for Fernando Alvarado, the discussion should not just be about having a powerful public broadcaster or some regulatory agency correcting media markets' improprieties: rather the

media must be public *tout court*, reflecting a model which resembles more to a sort of pure ‘statist’ model.

The second finding connected to that discussion on roles and dominant views on media regulation in a very thought-provoking way. During the interviews, subjects were asked about their opinion on the evolution of journalism’s quality and journalistic professionalism during Correa’s presidency, and surprisingly, against many assumptions about the relationship between populism and journalism, a majority of the informants manifested that the situation got better. This was an intriguing finding since one of the goals of the Communication Law was to push journalism’s professionalization. For example, the law literally addressed these issues, for instance, in article 10 –a long provision with four parts, which enforced deontological norms–, in section 4 (articles 39 to 44) which regulated conscience clause, source confidentiality or labor benefits, or in article 60 (about content identification); article 29 guaranteed journalists’ freedom to publish news even against the will of media owners or editors. Other articles had to do with fair payment and labor conditions for journalists, and the implementation of the law required that those producing news held degrees in journalism or communication. However, these ideal goals, contradicted statements, reports and analyses produced by local and international organizations and the generalized understanding of the destructive relationship between populism and independent media. With all these discussions highlighted in the field notebook, some kind of polarized response around the issue was also expected. But that was not exactly what happened.

Surprisingly, a clear majority of subjects, 19 out of 30, considered that quality and professionalism improved during Correa’s regime. However, the improvement’s origins and

main features were disputed. We could say that according to journalists and media policy actors there were two different forces, positive and negative, behind journalistic professionalism's alleged advancement. For 12 of the interviewees the transformation of Ecuador's journalism was part of a positive or progressive legislation and enforcement of media and communication rights, reflected in the Communication Law. According to them, legislation changed journalism by forcing reporters and editors to be professionals, to do a good job and take care of the new rights granted to them and to citizens. In contrast, for other participants, all of them very critical against Correa's regime, the transformation was seen as the result of a sort of negative process where journalists would have to do their job better to survive. For those respondents –7 out of those 19 who pointed out an improvement– journalists had to comply with the rules established by the law, and enforced by governmental agencies, to avoid consequences that could be real and disastrous, and this made them more rigorous and smarter. These excerpts drawn from interviewees in several positions, confirm the professional and quality amelioration, and illustrate the contrasting discourses (positive and negative) about how and why journalism improved:

I think so [that journalism improved]. For instance, economic instability makes you more timorous, makes you to work poorly. And that instability was very strong here; there were coworkers with twenty years of experience that were making the same money I was making in my beginnings in the profession. I had coworkers . . . and you asked to them how much they made, and they responded “150 dollars and it depends if I get advertising for my show” . . . Furthermore, university degrees were not required [before the Law]. The law raised this issue. And it also demands to verify your sources. (Anonymous, public media)

I would think that [the Law] made us more cautious. Now we are, all of us, used to that, we provide more documents to support something... So, I

think that in that regard, yes. Before (the Law) I was working in the Courts section, and we used to write the name of the accused . . . So, it [law] did make us take care of individuals. That was good. (Roberto Rueda, *Expreso*)

[The law] pushed us to pay attention on all sides; it forced us to take care in a way you have no idea; to read and re-read everything in a way you have no idea. It made us so brainy that it made us good journalists. Yet, about having the opening to say things that were being managed badly or just corruption... it didn't. (Ricardo Zambrano, *El Universal*)

The Communication Law *pushed* them to be careful, to be rigorous, to be good journalists, and it also *gave* them some rights and stability. When talking about the evolution of journalism, some participants also praised the law for opening media to the interaction with the people. Finally, most of the respondents endorsed measures to boost national media production also introduced by the law alongside other policies, such as the mandatory introduction of 5% of inter-cultural content in news media outlets.

In any case, it is very interesting to notice that an external institution to media companies –the law and therefore, the state– was the factor that ended up forcing a sort of ‘professional’ transformation. Two of the participants, both of them very close to Correa’s government, mentioned France’s *Loi sur la Liberté de Presse* passed in 1881 as a true pioneer regulation and some sort of inspiration for the Ecuadorian case. Let’s recall that the state had a key role in that law, acknowledging the need of regulating the rights of rectification (provisions 12 and 13) and how public authorities were to deal (and sanction) with defamations, false accusations or just the propagation of false news (sections 26, 27 and 38). For instance, article 12 set the specific terms for rectifications in news media, where “the manager will be required to insert, free of charge, at the top of the next issue of the journal or writing periodic, all the corrections which will be sent to it by a depositary of the

public authority, about the acts of his office which have been incorrectly reported by said newspaper or written periodic”. It seemed as if at some point during the conversations, for some of the interviewees the Ecuadorian law looked similar (or at least with comparable issues and legitimation) to their French analogue from the late 1800’s¹⁴⁰, and a fascinating, and conflictive, relationship between the state, the media and a more disciplined profession was established. As one of Correa’s most renowned former collaborators and at the moment of the interview harshest antagonist put it, the central question around Correa’s Ecuador was a state that promoted a particular modernization, and perhaps journalism was just another central element for that plan:

The state is there, and I’m not opposed to the state’s modernization, what happens is that... modernization for what? And how are you going to modernize the state? What happened here was the disciplining of the society in every aspect with a goal of modernizing capitalism, no more no less! (Alberto Acosta, analyst, and former politician)

5.- Discussion: Historical lessons and ‘populist’ regulation

This chapter has dealt with how journalists and media policy actors experienced Correa’s media populist regime. After analyzing the origins and development of the clash between Correa and the press, and the logic and expansion of the populist president’s media policy and actions, we centered our investigation on the takes and knowledge of journalists and media policy actors about those policies and decisions. We started with an article

¹⁴⁰ Let’s recall the difficult birth of France’s Third Republic, marked by Louis Napoleon’s defeat by Prussia in 1871, the wild repression of the Paris Commune and a decade of fluctuations among pro-Republican political parties, anti-Republican conservative factions and the new mass socialist unions and political organizations. The above-mentioned *Loi de la Liberté de Presse* was passed when the Republic was actually becoming a more stable regime.

assessing Correa's media policy, published jointly by one of the most prominent American journals on news media and a prestigious journalists association and we emphasized the particular approach towards press freedom and journalism that the publication presented. It was a libertarian or negative conceptualization of press freedom, which, at least in its basic features, met stances that we already analyzed, especially in chapter 2. This libertarian approach distrusts media regulation and thinks that society (or the market) must be the primary ruler and enabler of independent media. We assumed that since this view seems to be hegemonic in the public discourse and even academia, it had to be reflected on discourses drawn from journalists and media actors in Ecuador. However, qualitative data from the field, gathered through in-depth interviews with more than 30 subjects from very different backgrounds and sectorial positions, said something different.

Most journalists and media policy actors thought that even if press freedom was at risk (at least for a narrow majority of them), media regulation was needed, and professionalism actually improved during Correa's presidency. They also imagined and idealized journalism in a more complex and comprehensive way than the famous watchdog model that the libertarian conceptualizations tended to emphasize. A positive approach towards press freedom and free speech was then more spread throughout the media community than expected. Media regulation was welcomed because media was problematic *before* Correa came to power. The creation of public media was also overwhelmingly celebrated even if most of the subjects acknowledged the blatant allegiance of these media to Correa's government. So, the majority of those interviewed supported principles and an understanding of the relations between the government and legislation with media

considerably opposed to libertarian ideals. It was quite surprising that a clear majority of responses acknowledged an improvement of journalistic professionalism and quality during Correa's presidency. On the other hand, the use of some legal concepts and especially the state of press freedom in Ecuador triggered a polarized discussion between journalists and media actors aligned with Correa's government, and journalists and media actors working in private media and totally opposed to Correa. It is fascinating that in a country which was labeled since 2013 as 'not free' by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, and where a charismatic president was ripping up newspapers almost every Saturday in his populist show, presented a shared discourse supporting media regulation and confirming the improvement of journalistic professionalism.

Historical excursus about media independence

However, these counterintuitive results, as unusual or contradictory with dominant discourses they may be, speak about a misunderstanding around the emergence of democratic media in the West and, at least, in Latin America. And this misunderstanding, I believe, also hinders our understanding of relations between populism and mediatization, or politics and media. Media didn't constitute themselves as institutions independent from political or economic actors by a sort of spontaneous generation when mass media started to expand in the first decades of the Twentieth century. The libertarian rhetoric, which emerged and was inspired in the struggle of the rising bourgeoisie during the American and French revolutions against the *Ancient Regime's* censorship, basically didn't make sense during the first decades of the Twentieth century. The state itself didn't represent the *Ancient Regime*,

but more complex interests and issues; and those bourgeois revolutionary actors were no longer oppressed and powerless, at least in most of the developed Western countries. After the so-called Second Industrial Revolution, and the rise of Taylorism and Fordism, besides the consolidation of powerful labor movements (expressed through trade unions and first mass parties), the old bourgeois libertarian concept of press freedom didn't play the same role as in the past. Actually, the public sphere at that era didn't reflect that 'rational' discussion *à la Habermas*, but the business of a number of new private companies and the expansion of new types of partisan media, especially in Western Europe. The appearance of first media moguls in the United States, such as William Randolph Hearst, instrumentalizing the press (sometimes using what would be defined in the future as sensationalist or populist media) to pursue his particular interests, could be the perfect symptom of those times. Now, the libertarian conceptualization, perfectly reflected in the restrictive comprehension of the First Amendment, basically worked to maintain the public sphere's status quo, controlled by specific private actors with evident political interests. The interwar period with FDR's New Deal, attacked by most of the press, and the president himself reinventing political communication through radio (Yu, 2005: Ryfe, 2006), supports, I believe, a solid argument against thinking of media as institutions almost magically born independent just removing the state of the equation. The interwar crisis in the Western world –liberalism's crisis at the end of the day–, followed by a global war, put clearly into question the role of the state towards media, among other layers of the economic, social, and cultural life.

After the Second World War, a new paradigm emerged (Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003) reflecting the social democratic or Keynesian *zeitgeist*. The first televisions

broadcasters and a number of radio stations were a public business, created by the state, in Western Europe, and in the United States the first private television broadcasters (CBS, ABC and NBC) were regulated. Libertarian or negative approaches towards press freedom (as for other types of freedom) weren't hegemonic for decades and it wasn't at least until in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s that a wave of deregulation, liberalization and privatization started to transform media markets and the functioning of media institutions. I believe that the dominant conception of media (and journalism) as independent professional institutions providing more or less objective and contextualized information about the current events, derives from a sort of middle ground created by those two periods, mixing the Post-War social democrat pacts (not totally dismantled during the neoliberal turn, mainly in Western Europe) with the libertarian approach that began to consolidate in the 1980s. It is very important to notice how that conception of 'independence', with specific historical, political and economic roots, has become naturalized and abstracted from its context.

In Latin America, where industrialization in the first decades of the Twentieth century was limited and many feudal *Ancient Regime* structures persisted, these processes didn't take place, or were lived in a different way. First of all, the emergence of the old 'bourgeois' press freedom concept linked to the emergence of a public sphere opposed to the *Ancient Regime* was distinct; unchanged feudal institutions and the lack of a dynamic bourgeois class in those countries would make many liberal notions materially alien to the context of those nations. The state thus would play a different role in the Nineteenth century regarding press freedom and free speech, and authoritarian tendencies (including a strong conservative Catholicism and a sort of prevailing feudal racist caste system) would be more

persistent compared to weak liberal sectors. After the Second World War, nonetheless, the state started to be seen as a key factor to trigger the economic development of the region, and rising media markets and journalism were also influenced by this trend, although with technological and business limitations. Both high levels of inequality and illiteracy were reduced but never matched the massive redistribution and modernization experienced in the West. The first mass organizations began to appear (unions, parties, and media), and an increasing percentage of the population became active in politics, but democratic limitations continued, and this expansion in the 50s and 60s was contested with the backlash of authoritarian dictatorships throughout the region in the 1970s. In that context, Latin America followed a path of media regulation similar to the United States (saving the economic and technological distances) with private companies leading national media, including broadcasters. In the 1980s, these societies, with persistent inequality, racism and marginalization of large sectors of their populations, and the fresh experience of military authoritarian rule, adopted the neo-liberal turn assuming a formal negative concept of press freedom. It is in that context, without the social democratic pacts or the nuanced implementation of the neoliberal agenda established in the West, where media must be situated in Latin America. Correa's political project was presented as a direct consequence and challenge to that context. Extrapolating a concept of 'independent media' emerging from concrete conditions in the West to the Ecuadorean context is at best a serious analytical mistake. Once the problem about analyzing media in Latin American as a mere equivalence to media in the West is resolved, it may be easier to understand why journalists and media policy actors welcomed media regulation and public media (or at least considered the need

of some change) and deemed that professionalism improved in the last decade with Correa in power.

5.1.- Populism and regulation

On the other hand, Correa's media policy and actions were designed and implemented by a full populist president, and at this point the question of how this undeniable populist logic was reflected in regulation needs to be discussed. Possibly, the populist dimension of media policy could be situated in the more polarizing effects of those policies, the most controversial legal figures created by the law (such as media lynching, for instance, vaguely defined¹⁴¹ and criticized almost by all actors) and mainly in the implementation or the usage of the law. As we saw in previous chapters and will examine in the following sections, if something characterized Correa's populist rule it was the division of the Ecuadorean society following an 'us versus them' logic, and mostly the extreme personalization of Correa's rule, clearly reflected in *Enlace Ciudadano* as well as in the arbitrariness of law's enforcement; Supercom's boss Carlos Ochoa close relationship with Correa illustrated perfectly that point.

So, regulation was welcomed, and probably needed in Ecuador, but possibly distorted by Correa's populist action. However, it may be also naïve to think that such those media policies could have been designed, legislated and implemented by consensus or by

¹⁴¹ Explained in the Communication Law, article 26, as "the dissemination of information that, directly or through third parties, is produced in a concerted manner and repeatedly published through one or more communication media, with the purpose of discrediting a natural or legal person or reducing their public credibility".

traditional political actors. As we have highlighted on several occasions, media in Ecuador were not exactly those more or less neutral or ideologically honest institutions more or less ideally naturalized in the West, and those policies obviously affected their traditional *modus operandi*, hence the virulence with which these media attacked any regulatory measure. It should be noted that Correa couldn't legislate directly about media until 2013, six years after he had been elected, when his party (as personalized as it was) won a massive legislative majority in the national parliament. Moreover, the Communication Law was passed with criticism, even inside the ruling party, against those vague legal figures and potentially controversial institutions (such as Supercom), as views from *Correista* supporters made clear in this chapter. Correa's populist dimension was therefore possibly both the enabler of a law that never would have passed in a country that had barely regulated media, and the risk that the new legislation would be captured to support the government and to persecute the people's enemies. On the other hand, populism, as a non-liberal logic, possibly tends to be more inclined to positive freedom stances; but these thoughts would need to be nuanced and observed comparing populist experiences throughout the world. Latin American leftwing populism seems to fit in that norm. Right-wing populism in Eastern Europe may be look similar in their sympathies on media regulation and state intervention (Surowiec & Štětka, 2020), although their objectives, very often openly against specific outgroups and ideologies, cannot be easily aligned with classical cases of actions promoting positive press freedom of the so-called Democratic Corporatist media systems. Trump's experience in the United States, on the other hand, seems to point out to an extreme libertarian stance merged with some authoritarian positions. In addition to that, Kenny's claim (2019, p. 2-13) that left-wing

populism is more correlated with lower press freedom scores, since Kenny is using a clear negative conception, may support a different understanding of freedom and press freedom depending on the populist's ideological direction. Gandesha has shown (2018) from a social psychology approach, that left-wing populism, which defines its antagonisms through "social structures and institutions", more rationally than right-wing positions, is likely to adopt positive freedom stances. In any case, more about these distinctions and dispositions should be examined in further research.

In conclusion, if we go back to the conversation about the relationship between populism and the media, media reform under Correa and the reception of his media populist regime adds another layer to the discussion and enables a more complex analysis of this particular encounter. It would have been easier and simpler if the majority of subjects interviewed had rejected frontally Correa's reform and media regulation, or at least had presented a clearer polarized scenario. That picture would have been easily connected to the assumptive clash between two clearly opposed logics, media and populism. But that didn't happen, and that probably has to do, among other things, with that misunderstanding, explained above, which assumed that mainstream media were independent, and presumably professional, before and during Correa; and by the important omission of the state as a relevant factor shaping news media, possibly due to the libertarian hegemony solidly integrated in the public discourse since the 1980s. The role of the state in creating and developing press freedom, free speech and independent media is logically out of question for the libertarian or negative conception, but its real weight, unequivocal even in the more 'liberal' environments, such as the United States, needs to be considered and analyzed to

fully understand the mediatization of politics and its relationship with populism. Ecuadorean journalists and media actors were not, in any case, rejecting media regulation and Correa's policy promises, and a context with unprecedented state intervention produced a better professional journalism in a complex way, displaying a negative and positive *productive discipline*, using the concept in the most Foucauldian manner. This final fascinating evidence gives us an example on how the state plays a complicated role developing journalism and shaping the media logic, beyond narrow negative approaches depicting a threatening macro institution at odds with press freedom or the archenemy of the independent journalism. In the next chapter, we will examine these questions further, using content analysis to unravel how these discussions materialized in journalistic and editorial work.

Chapter 4, in part, is a reprint of the material as it appears in Palos Pons, M. and Hallin, C. D. (2021) "Press freedom and media reform in a populist regime: How Ecuadorian journalists and policy actors see the Correa era". *International Journal of Communication* 15, 1021–1038. The dissertation author was the primary author of this paper.

Chapter 5:

“Nos hizo más listos y mejores”: Polarization, parallelism, and professionalization in news content

One of the methodological goals of the investigation, especially after my first visit to the field, was to examine as a participant observer how journalistic work was actually performed in a newsroom in Ecuador. I assumed this was relevant information to complement in-depth interviews and the quantitative approach on news content. This study needed, in sum, to show and observe from the locus of journalistic professionalism, how power relations and the specific cultural, legal and political context would look like in a real scenario. It was a difficult task, but eventually I could provide a newsroom ethnography, although one year after Correa had left the presidency. The results from that experience, as we will see, support evidence already delivered, and may be quite meaningful to start a complex analysis on news content as the final materialization of the convoluted although systematic production of a newspaper:

July 24, 2018. Expreso's headquarters in Guayaquil, sitting at Sara's compartment; she is the acting general editor of the newspaper this week. Now it's 5:10 pm, and she's writing the frontpage. She explains that in Ecuador frontpages are not usually descriptive. Most of the time, they express an opinion. I ask her if that is not sensationalist or whether she would do the same in Spain [Sara is a Spaniard; she has been working at Expreso since 2013] and she responds she wouldn't, but "this is not sensationalism either; this is 'editorializing'". Next, she shows me Expreso's newsroom. There are between 50 and 60 persons, combining all sections. I calculate that in the newsroom (where I can see a big representation of the local news section) there are around 25-30 persons now, working as reporters or editors. At the design section there must be around 10-15 persons, and between 5-10 at the

photography section. In total, in the company, there are around 200 persons, claims Sara. I suppose she means *Expreso*'s (the third most read newspaper in the country, although there are not reliable data about newspapers' readership), and *Extra*'s newsrooms combined. *Extra* is a tabloid owned by the same company, *Granasa*, the most read in the country, and probably the firm's big cash-engine.

The newsroom is a space that measures around 150-200 square meters, divided by compartments. Sara tells me that wearing shorts is forbidden. Now everything is quiet. It is curious the little importance (still?) of the Internet or the newspaper online edition. It is 5:20 pm and people write. The noise made by numerous fingers tapping keyboards fills the room. Sara sits down and gets up constantly to comment and to ask (or consult) about the frontpage's main headlines. [Although from my seat I cannot hear what they are talking about] I suppose that many reporters are exchanging views with her regarding their stories. There is a clear post-colonial dimension in the fact that Sara and her boss (now he's on vacation) are Spaniards (and white). The majority of the staff is mestizo, but I think I have seen one of the owners of the company and he looked 'criollo'¹⁴² (white of Spanish origin). There's one Afro-Ecuadorean worker. Everything is quiet.

Obviously, I'm drawing the attention from the people in the room; as if they wondered what this dude was doing here: 'again, the Spaniards controlling, ruling...' Sara is still busy with the frontpage. I observe and listen to the editors correcting rank and file reporters. People show Sara their pages already finished and designed; she has to approve them with her signature. Journalists' compartments are personalized and, in many cases, filled with papers. The technology equipment is LG; they use Mac in the edition/design desks. There are television screens hanging from the ceiling. One of the cleaners is Afro-Ecuadorean [the same individual mentioned above]. This also happens at *Flacso* (where menial works are done by Afro-Ecuadoreans). A framed sentence by Henrik Johan Ibsen presides one of the walls of the newsroom. "The true columns of society are truth and liberty", it reads above the reproduction of a historical monument at Guayaquil's downtown made of columns that commemorates Francisco de Orellana, founder of the city and explorer of the Amazon. I see now a closing sheet. The frontpage is closed at 6:40 pm, it says. It is the last issue to be closed.

On my left, in the compartment next to mine, I see a calendar with electoral propaganda of some political party (none of those I know) headed by "Cynthia and Henry Llanes". It's 6:20 pm; the deadline gets closer. I see some graphs too, representing the National Assembly's political composition. Correa's name is heard a lot in the newsroom. Correa still sets

¹⁴² In Spanish America, *criollo*, a category dating back to colonial times, traditionally means white person born in America of Spanish or European origin, in contrast to *Peninsular*, or an individual born in Spain that in colonial times worked for the imperial administration.

the agenda, indirectly or unintentionally, in this medium. I notice a sort of obsession or viscerality against Correa and his allies.

6:30 pm. It seems that the closing time is delayed. They are supposed to be closing pages at this point [and they aren't]. I think that many of them are completed since I see some reporters making jokes, relaxed. They talk about "support" or about "the thesis"; maybe the reporter who's talking is an intern, or she's studying for a master's degree. [Summer is the usual time for interns to work in newspapers] "Tomorrow we finish early, and we go to dance with Uncle Vargas", says one editor. I think he is the boss in local news. I see Sara putting numbers to pages. Designers are focused on their work, wearing headphones. It seems that Sara is completing the last text box. She is the last one, closing the frontpage. I see Sara 'tracking' words to fit them into the text boxes. Two editors, the design's boss and the managing editor, I suppose, are arguing about some graphs. Sara takes an important phone call. The owner [el dueño, a male boss] is speaking. Sara addresses the owner using the formal 'usted'. The phone call is about an advertisement from Asociación Ecuatoriana de Editores de Periódicos. The company is not working for, nor is associated with that organization, Sara is told. The ad has to be removed. This is a problem at this point. The design must be changed, text boxes expanded, etc. The closing is delayed due to that failure/problem with that ad that must not be there. This is interesting: the owner is totally involved; it seems he reads everything and controls everything from distance. Meanwhile, the sports' editor is interested in one headline at the frontpage: "about a fight, a crossfire". It seems he is hesitating a little on how to qualify the tension within the soccer federation.

The problem with the ad messes a little everything. A fourth of a page must be reworked. The people in the newsroom refer to the owner as "the doctor". The frontpage, written by Sara, is read by the managing editor, and it is signed by her or by Nelson (who I think is the other managing editor). Some people read and correct the pages of other people. The final ok arrives, and the newspaper is put it to bed.

The above paragraphs are the translation from Spanish of what I wrote in my field journal that day in *Expreso's* newsroom during closing hours. As mentioned in the text, *Expreso* is generally ranked the third legacy newspaper in importance in Ecuador¹⁴³. The same company, Granasa, owns *Extra*, the principal tabloid in the country, considered the

¹⁴³ The private company that measures audience ratings, the British-Brazilian Kantar Ibope, only works in Quito and Guayaquil, and I didn't have access to real data about readership and television ratings, even if I asked for them directly to the company during a interview in its headquarters at Quito.

most read newspaper in Ecuador. Granasa is owned by the Martínez Merchán family since its foundation in the 1970s. I got access to that newsroom thanks to some contacts from my former life as a journalist in Spain. Sara is Ecuador's stringer for *El País* newspaper besides editor at *Expreso*; and the Andes' region editor in chief in *El País* (Sara's boss) is a friend of mine, Francesco; we both belonged to the same cohort in our master's degree in journalism in Spain.

First of all, it is striking how racial and class differences played out in that Ecuadorean newsroom; perhaps some of these observations of post-colonial clues are useful to understand deep layers of power structures in the country. It is very interesting to see how white criollos and Spaniards shared most of managerial positions, besides the number, value and arrangement of resources. Additionally, compared to media monsters such as the *New York Times* (employing 1,700 journalists), *The Guardian* (around 800) or *El País* (around 500), *Expreso* looks like an extremely small company, while is true that Ecuador's scale cannot be comparable to the United States, the United Kingdom or Spain. But, focusing on the main topics of this research, possibly the major finding of that participant observation is the peculiar role of the newspaper's owner in the news production process. He, *the doctor*, directly intervened to stop the newspaper's closing process to remove an apparently insignificant institutional advertisement. Due to that decision, which the acting general editor didn't question in any moment, the newspaper was sent to the printers around one hour later than expected. Moreover, the general editor addressed to the owner using the formal 'usted' in a stark contrast to the more informal communication performed among all individuals involved in the process; and the noun 'publisher' (instead of 'owner') was never

employed. The scene, in summary, clearly shows a disparity between the owner and the newsroom; a symbolic divergence ('tú' in the room, 'usted' addressing "the doctor" or the owner) and a material contrast: the owner had the last word to complete the job.

This sequence may provide an idea of how social and professional interactions look in an Ecuadorean newsroom among the different actors producing the news, from the publisher to rank-and-file reporters or photographers. And a key aspect emerged among others: the newsroom's autonomy seemed limited by media ownership, something that can be connected to situations depicted in the previous chapters in which media in Ecuador didn't seem as professional or autonomous as some voices were trying to emphasize. A similar situation came out during an interview with Arturo Torres when he was the general editor of mighty *El Comercio*, the most influential newspaper in Ecuador, together with *El Universo*. After my questions, Torres pointed out that he only had control over the newsroom, but not over opinion pages. "Only information", he told me, circumspect, when I visited him in the summer of 2017 at *El Comercio's* newsroom in Quito¹⁴⁴, a building with space, resources and personnel that doubled *Expreso's* numbers. This situation is at odds with what is common in most news media in the so-called West, where directors, general editors or editors in chiefs are usually in control of the whole operation, and they are journalists by training. Publishers or owners are obviously influential, but the relations between ownership and newsroom are very delimited, and conflicts or interventions appear in very specific circumstances, obviously not in minor decisions about small advertisements.

¹⁴⁴ Newsroom ethnographies were also suggested for *El Comercio*, *El Universo* and other media, but it only worked out for *Expreso*. At least I visited those other newsrooms, though quite briefly.

However, those moments at *Expreso* took place in the summer of 2018, a period in which Lenin Moreno's government had materialized its rupture with Correa's legacy. Moreno's administration reversed almost every policy set out by the Correa's administration, from economic policies to foreign relations; calls were made to reform the Communication Law and Supercom's activities were suspended. In this context, an evident question emerges of how those relations in the newsroom, partially described above, played out systematically with Correa in power, compared to what the norm in Ecuador was before 2007. Since ethnographic methods have their logical limitations to collect data over the years, the content analysis project designed to complement the qualitative ethnographic approach was necessary to observe how the changes in the Ecuadorean media system had crystallized in media content, assessing the arguments and claims introduced chapter 2 and 3, and especially in chapter 4, where journalists and media actors discussed about their situation before and during Correa's era. Here drawing from content analysis from years 2005, 2006, 2015 and 2016 of Ecuador's most important newspapers, *El Comercio* and *El Universo*¹⁴⁵, the question about populism's relationship with news media is reenacted with an angle focused on how news content was transformed with Correa in power.

More specifically, this chapter is structured by a theoretical discussion of the research available, followed by three hypotheses and one research question discussing those approaches examining the relationship between populism in power and journalism, polarization and professionalism. The content analysis work, illustrated by an additional in-

¹⁴⁵ As already revealed, ethnographies at *El Comercio's* and *El Universo* newsrooms were planned but the proposal was never answered. On the other hand, *Expreso's* archive is pretty limited to be used for content analysis, so, at the end, news organizations involved in newsroom ethnographies and content analyses happened to differ from each other.

depth news analysis of the main findings, concludes in two seemingly contradictory discoveries: after years of a widely influential populist leader in power, both an increase of political polarization and the improvement of professional practices were observed in the press. Additionally, the evidence suggests that the polarization was developed together with a particular political parallelism, stabilized in the media system and absent before Correa came to power, together with a muted media populism, which shifted from the more studied *populism through the media*, towards a sort of *Antipopulist populism through the media*. All this finally supports an argument stating that the mediatization process is not an expeditious path from political influenced institutions to apolitical media logics ruling social and political fields, but a more complicated story. In fact, this particular research supposes a reversed counter-intuitive relation between populism and mediatization, for populism in power affected professionalism, one of the core dimensions of media logic, and it did it by challenging media directly or indirectly, passing new legislation or fighting media's traditional *status quo*. These conclusions, eventually, contest many almost naturalized assumptions about the birth and nature of professional journalism and widespread allegations about the impact of populism over the press.

1.- Media populism, content analysis and populism in power

Thus far, the relationship between populism and journalism in empirical studies using content analysis has been explored looking at how populist ideas are expressed by the media in what researchers call “media populism”¹⁴⁶ (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017:

¹⁴⁶ Normally these studies employ Mudde's (2004) ideational or the definition of populism as a “thin” ideology depicted by the basic conflict between the people and the elites.

367-371), an approach that we already adopted in chapter 1, to examine the types of media populism that emerged around Correa as a populist candidate. This conceptualization, let's recall, has been classified into three distinct associations: a) *populism by the media*, when populism is consciously disseminated by some media; b) *populism through the media*, when populist actors may convey their values and goals via mainstream media that are not aligned with their goals; and c) *populist citizen journalism*, when the reception of populist messages and views from the public/audience may shape the values transmitted.

Some empirical works included in that 'media populism' approach have brought to the light how some journalism's styles and formats, explored through content analysis, suggest interesting interactions with populist ideas in news media. For instance, Hameelers, Bos & de Vreese (2019) find a positive correlation between interpretative journalism and populist communication, and a negative association between neutral journalism and what they call "populist blame attributions". Additionally, Wettstein et al (2018) claim that the "most important media predictor" for populism is tabloid orientation, suggesting that this media format is highly correlated with populist attitudes. Furthermore, Hameleers and Vliegenthart (2019), employing a longitudinal content analysis of several Dutch media (broadsheet and tabloids) from years 1990 to 2017, argue that a "populist fragmented discourse" has indeed increased in the last 28 years in the Netherlands, in any newspaper typology (tabloids or legacy, right-wing or left-wing) and without a strong correlation with electoral years. Hameleers and Vliegenthart make the interesting argument that there's evidence of a strong correlation between the increasing commercialism in the press and the rise of populism in general, beyond specific media formats, a claim that, by the way, seems

to support Mazzoleni's thesis (2014) which deems populism as a sort of subordinated or consequential product of the ruling commercial media logic consolidated in the West in the last decades.

Notwithstanding the useful knowledge advanced by that research, some problems arise around its scope and approach. First of all, the 'media populism' approach so far is basically centered on Western Europe and is obviously tied to the European context. In the case of populism and media, the former usually appears in its right-wing combination and if populism is ever in power it is through some sort of coalition alongside more established political parties, potentially reducing the influence of those political actors¹⁴⁷. In addition to that, these studies assume populism as something that is expressed through media, but don't seem to consider how the rise of populism may influence media's practices, professional norms or ideology, at least not directly. Media, in other words, is taken as a static field, neutral or even naturalized from its context –an approach correlated with mainstream mediatization theses which tend to observe the press as neutral or independent *per se*, as we saw in the previous chapters– while political systems or society at large are shaken by the emergence¹⁴⁸ of those populist ideas. Only tangentially Hameelers, Bos & de Vreese, Wettstein and Hameleers and Vliegenthart suggest societal changes and trends, such as the expansion of commercial media, which may shape styles or formats associated to the rise of populism, but the question itself is not fully or directly asked.

¹⁴⁷ Populism in power in Europe has tended to be represented by right wing alignments, with the late exceptions of Greece (center-nationalist-leftwing populism), Italy (first, rightwing populism-leftwing populism association, later center-left- leftwing populism alignment) and Spain (center-left-leftwing populist); as it can be seen, all these leftist populist actors also came to power via coalition governments.

1.1.- 'Silencing' arguments

Compared to the previous field of research, there's much less literature focused on how populism influences media when a populist leader is in power, and there's not a single work using content analysis to study that question. Even though it seems quite clear that for most of the scholarship populism is perceived as a negative factor for the independent press' values and role, how is this materialized in news media content appears much less obvious. This void is filled by several alternative and sometimes contradictory responses that differentiate at least two approaches to the question of how ruling populism affects news media: a 'silencing thesis', by which populism clearly diminishes media's critical role or oppositional stances, and a 'polarization premise', by which populism triggers strong processes of social division or conflict and this is reflected by media.

The first approach was already partially studied in previous chapters, addressing the alleged broad negative interaction between populism and the press, although here is more directly focused on populism in power influencing news media. For instance, Rogenhofer and Panievsky (2020) contribute to that perspective developing a comparative analysis of the relations between populists in power and the press in Erdogan's Turkey, Modi's India and Netanyahu's Israel, and they find striking similarities. The three leaders used the government to harass critical media, imposed regulations, promoted alliances with private media to receive positive coverage and triggered self-censorship. In a similar line of thought, let's recall Kenny's (2020) global study, discussed in the previous chapter, by which populist rule seems to be associated with declines in press freedom. According to this scholar, this

aspect of hostility against press freedom appears particularly intensified in the case of left-wing populism, since these political actors are inclined to intervene in the economy, including media markets. Kellam and Stein (2016), also commented in the previous chapters, claim in an article conspicuously titled “Silencing critics” a direct correlation between the rise of leftist populist governments in Latin America, such as Correa’s Ecuador or Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela, and restrictions in media freedom and harassment to the independent press that is seen as an oppositional force to their political project. In sum, these authors appear to coincide in a sort of ‘silencing’ or ‘repressive’ thesis by which populists in power would damage press freedom and repress critical stances from non-friendly media.

To complete this approach, Panievsky (2021), studying Israel’s Netanyahu, claims that populism interaction with journalism with an ethos of objectivity turns into a “soft form of censorship” consisting of “sowing distrust among news audiences while also encouraging self-censorship among journalists” (2137). Her argument is similar to the formers’ since Panievsky thinks of news media’s independence (Israeli, in her case) as self-evident, even to the point of proposing a thesis stating that journalists’ ‘objectivity’ (one of the ideological principles of media’s independence, she explains) plays against journalism’s interest to tame “anti-media populism”. It is interesting how the Ecuadoran case appears here in an inverted way; contradicting Panievsky’s assumption, the clash between Correa and the press was marked by media’s lack of objective and professional work. The Israeli author, in any case, seems to disregard the possibility that ‘objective’ journalism perhaps was not fully deployed in Israel’s case¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁹ However, the idea of a problematic structure of the so-called ‘objectivist’ journalism, emerged in the United States first, and later spread out throughout the Western world, especially after the World War II, is interesting

Finally, let's recall the multitude of analyses, studies, opinion articles and reports that have expanded on the same premise of populism threatening news media. We cited in chapter 3 a report published by the University of Washington in 2018 highlighting populism's hostility against press freedom, possibly reflecting pervasive public discourses. Another revered institution, the Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute of International Studies, follows that mainstream discourse about populist fighting the independent press in an article analyzing populism as a global phenomenon (Grzymala-Busse et al, 2020). In this report, the backlash against the media is described in varied ways, such as populists "deployment of misinformation, disinformation, and false conspiracy" (4), or populist governments funding allied media and depriving "independent newspapers and radio of advertising revenue, or simply commandeered the state broadcast media to serve as a government propaganda machine" (6).

1.2.- Polarization theses

Other scholars (Afonso and Papadopoulos, 2015; Handlin, 2018; Müller et al, 2017; Roberts, 2021) link populism with polarization, an approach that may be at odds with the previous theses, since a deep divide between views, identities or political divisions in a media system doesn't directly denote a problem of media silencing or journalists' autonomy's suppression. Obviously, the very existence of media wars, or the resounding

and may trigger an interesting discussion about the limitations of 'objective' journalism today. Especially if some attention is given to the fact that the context that created that approach and practices has changed, and today is marked with the strengthening of a commercialization logic related to a structural shift in media's political economy since the 1980s. We will discuss this important point further in the conclusion chapter.

clash between the populist government and mainstream media analyzed in chapter 2, might be logically associated to the increasing polarization of news media content. Polarization normally is defined, following DiMaggio et al (1996, as cited in Prior, 2013: 105) both as a state and a process materialized in four different dimensions: “the dispersion of opinions, the extent to which attitudes cluster around two contrasting positions with few moderate views in between, the link between different issue positions (“ideological polarization”), and the existence of systematic differences between subpopulations (‘identity-based polarization’). Polarization seems to be easily associated with populism, especially under the second dimension in which opinions or ideological stances are grouped around two contrasting positions. Some literature confirms connections between “societal polarization” and populism in Europe and Latin America. For instance, Afonso and Papadopoulos (2015) show how the rise of right wing populist parties in Switzerland polarizes former settled views in the country around welfare programs. In addition, Müller et al (2017) expose how the introduction of populist ideas in the media increase polarization in four important urban areas in the continent. Furthermore, Handlin (2018) presents a correlation of “state crises” and the emergence of left wing populist leaders as the principal cause of increasing polarization in many South American countries, including Ecuador.

There are also more general theoretical or normative discussions on how polarization and populism meet. Waisbord (2018), as we briefly mentioned in chapter 2, opposes populism’s ontology (the ‘us versus them’ logic) to democratic communication and highlights the cases of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Rafael Correa in Ecuador as examples of that dangerous polarizing rationale that constructs a unified, pure, people to combat some

elite or out-group enemy, deploying a damaging Manichean conception of the public sphere. A similar perspective is defended by Roberts (2021), who systematizes populism's polarization into three dimensions: constitutive, spatial, and institutional. As Roberts explains, the first aspect deals with populism's inherent political logic dividing the world through the frontier drawn between the people and its enemies (the "us versus them" logic); the second comprises the spatial distribution of ideological stances about economic and cultural issues, and it is here where right-wing and left-wing populism obtain their differential features; finally, the institutional dimension elaborates on populism's tendency to expand their inherent polarization to any setting, even essential democratic liberal institutions (such as the electoral law, voting systems, etc.) risking to demonize political adversaries and the basic rules of the game. This research basically deals with all those dimensions observed¹⁵⁰, although in this chapter, centered on content analysis, the question about the spatial representation of polarization through ideological stances was directly addressed through an *ideology* variable.

Additionally, polarization may be linked to some kind of 'political parallelism' in the media system, mirroring media's alignment with those opposed views, and it was thought that relations between populism, polarization and political parallelism should be explored in

¹⁵⁰ Other results emerged from news content could also speak about the constitutive issues addressed by Roberts, defining the type of populism in Ecuador. We discussed in chapter 2 how an observed *populism through the media* in 2005 and 2006 divided the society between the people and the *political class* plus the *oligarchies*, making the Ecuadorean case an illustration of leftwing populism. Chapter 5, on the other hand, elaborated the allegedly institutional polarization in Ecuador through a critical examination of press freedom and media regulations; however, main conclusions from that chapter pushed aside a strong institutional polarization about media regulation itself, since it was demanded by most of the informants, and many focused their criticism on specific agencies and not on the mere existence of the current legislation and regulations; the reinforcement of journalistic professionalism during Correa's presidency certainly contradicts that type of polarization. Of course, a different conversation –which exceeds the content of this research– would be an evaluation of the use or control of other institutions under Correa, such as the agency monitoring elections, or other national institutions such as the Consejos de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social.

the Ecuadorean case. Hallin and Mancini's thesis (2004) of a strong political parallelism, or "the alignment of newspapers with different ideological, political, and cultural views" (Mancini, 2012: 266), in Polarized Pluralist media systems, provides evidence associating robust relationships between political actors and the media with high levels of polarization. Hallin and Mancini deal mostly with Mediterranean countries, such as Spain, Italy or Greece, but we can also examine whether in the Ecuadorean case a consistent political orientation took place or changed in the press with a populist president, even if Ecuador's media ecology doesn't correspond precisely to those European media models, besides the affinities or contact points between Ecuador and Spain due to historical colonial and postcolonial interactions, quite reflected in the introduction to this chapter. Well studied in Europe, there is not any research about this subject in Latin America, and in this facet, this content analysis might be considered as a pioneering study on the existence of political parallelism related with polarization in Latin America.

1.3.- Populist media reform and professionalism

The aforementioned works may presuppose that populism in power has a negative impact over journalistic professionalism. This conclusion may be straightforward for those endorsing a 'silencing' or repressing thesis, although it could be less clear connecting polarization with a deterioration of professionalism. While an increasing polarization contributing to a Manichean division of the public sphere, transforming media into opposed partisan bullhorns, may provide solid arguments about a negative influence over professionalism, the better and clearer representation of ideological stances or value

positions could also indicate legitimate and consistent different views about important topics enriching the public discussion and not certainly degrading it. Additionally, the qualitative analysis based on views expressed by journalists and media actors in Ecuador thoroughly explained in the previous chapter, pointed to an improvement of journalistic professionalism during Correa's era. Let's recall that, according to the featured discourses, it was produced by a double process of new positive rights granted to journalists by the policies enacted during Correa's presidency, and of intense scrutiny exercised by state agencies pushing journalists to be "smarter and better reporters" against a hostile government providing more sources and data to support their work.

To define journalistic professionalism this analysis refers to Hallin and Mancini's three dimensions (2004: 34-36) for which professional journalism is determined by journalists' *autonomy* (and their capacity to hold pressure from outside their field), *distinct professional norms* (a set of shared rules and practices assessing good and bad behavior as professionals) and *public service orientation* (situating the public interest beyond particular concerns). This research is aware that it is very complicated to extract a full comprehensive evaluation of professionalism through content analysis, but important aspects can be detected and evaluated supplementing qualitative research. For instance, autonomy or critical independence may be exanimated in the reporting tone (extremely supporting or adversarial tones may lead to doubts on media's instrumentalization, for example), and in the manner in which partisan views are displayed in the news (news media that are closer to representing just one side of the story would tend to be less autonomous). Also, distinct, and professional norms can be reflected in verified and balanced sources (reflecting many voices

and not just a homogenous sample of individuals or organizations) or in the use of genres in the news (a clear separation between news and opinion, for instance, would suggest a professional presentation of more or less objective news in contrast with opinion articles supporting the viewpoint of particular authors or the newspaper's editorial board). Furthermore, the public service orientation could be seen in the diversity of sources utilized, and in the openness and variety of the topics covered by the newspaper. From Quality Journalism literature we can also add the "comprehensive" and "contextual" reporting as a marker for norms and public service orientation (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015: 17-18). In summary, if we look at the way in which media content uses sources, covers subjects, represents political stances or ideologies, performs a particular tone, a target or genre, and supports or rejects political actors, we can suggest consistent responses to those theses or research aforementioned about the relation populism-the press, besides the more studied field of media populism.

All those questions, as they are addressed here, and the variables designed to explore them, were the result of a process of data collection and self-reflection around an investigation that was challenged by several factors. Possibly one of most demanding conditions was the high complexity of the Ecuadorean political system, together with its association with the media, as was highlighted in the introduction chapter. Before Correa came to power, political instability was the norm in the country, and classifying or 'disciplining' that political reality, coding that loose and promiscuous context in the press, was arduous. Many variables and underlying theses were mobilized in the beginning of the research, almost at the same time than most of the qualitative work was being implemented.

After reading the news in those newspapers and listening to many local journalists (some of them, working or having worked on those newspapers), a codebook and code sheet emerged, attuning firsthand variables and ideas. Also, contemporaneously, the attention put to scholarly discussions and relevant public debates (such as the one triggered by the article released by the Columbia Journalism Review in 2018, which introduced chapter 4) shaped the different types of claims that articulated the discussion that this content analysis eventually addresses. All these processes can be summarized in three hypotheses and one research question:

H1. Critical stances from oppositional media were suppressed with Correa in power.

H2. Polarization increased during Correa's presidency

H3. Populism under Correa led to an increase in journalistic professionalism

RQ. How was media populism expressed in news content during Correa's regime?

2.- Method and variables

As already explained in the *Introduction* of this dissertation, a longitudinal content analysis was designed to compare how specific variables would have performed before Rafael Correa came to power in 2007 and during his long tenure as president. A total of 768 stories, collecting 1816 sources, were divided between the most important newspapers in the country, *El Comercio* (Quito based) and *El Universo* (located in Guayaquil). Two units of analysis were selected, the story and the source. Articles were randomly selected (eight per month, per newspaper) from Politics, Ecuador/Society and Editorial/Opinion sections. Stories were taken from both newspapers' printed editions, since in years 2005 and 2006 the

Internet penetration in Ecuador was still very weak. The Nexis Unis database was used to search content on *El Comercio*; for *El Universo* the study relied on this newspaper's own search engine, which was very robust¹⁵¹.

The research was focused on years 2005, 2006 (two years before Correa came to power), 2015 and 2016 (two years in which Correa was at his peak of popularity and the Communication Law was already implemented). 2005 and 2006 were two very interesting years in contemporary Ecuador as we already saw in chapter 1. Let's recall that those years were marked by massive demonstrations in Quito, also known as the *Revuelta de los Forajidos* of April 2005, which were followed by President Lucio Gutiérrez's removal from power through a soft coup d'état. Gutiérrez's former vice-president, Alberto Palacio, would head an unstable government without a clear legislative support until the calling of presidential elections of 2006. Correa, until then a progressive Economics professor and frequent guest in some local and alternative radio stations, served as Minister of Finance during barely three months in Palacio's government (from April 20 to August 5, 2005), resigning due to differences with the president regarding negotiations with the International Monetary Fund.

In 2015 and 2016, Correa was at his peak of power and popularity. The Ecuadorean leader, now globally known by his constant media appearances, especially because of his relationship with Julian Assange, had won the presidential election in 2013 in a landslide, gaining control of both the executive and legislative branches of government. In that same year, the Communication Law was passed and throughout 2014, institutions and agencies

¹⁵¹ This fabulous search engine disappeared somewhere during the first months of 2020, making *El Universo* archive way less accessible.

newly created started to implement the law sparking criticism and accusations of authoritarian rule by domestic and international media, besides press freedom and journalism organizations. Possibly little of that criticism, including protests around the Yasuni-ITT project, turned down in 2013¹⁵², eroded Correa's popularity as the bad situation of international oil prices, which started to hurt the country's economy in 2015. Also in the same year, demonstrations led by indigenous movements and organizations (such as the powerful CONAIE) denouncing Correa's measures to compensate the revenue lost by the oil crisis (based on increasing property taxes and import tariffs) and constitutional amendments envisioned to allow indefinite presidential reelection among other actions, hit the news and were extensively reported. To make matters worse, a severe earthquake shook the nation on April 16, 2016.

As mentioned before, the shifting and very often turbulent political and legal contexts challenged coding political actors, different types of organizations and institutions. Another important aspect to pay attention to was whether the differences or similarities between the two newspapers affected the combined outcome of the analysis (in case if, for instance, one newspaper happened to be more friendly to the government than the other), but those differences were not statistically significant. This clarifies doubts mainly about *El Comercio*'s behavior towards Correa's government, since Grupo El Comercio's purchase by

¹⁵² The Yasuni-ITT Initiative, launched by Correa's government in 2007, basically promised to keep intact immense oil reserves in the Amazon in return of the payment by the international community of half of the value of those reserves at 2007 prices; it would account around 3.6 billion dollars committed to investments in clean energies and social programs. However, the project was canceled by Correa in 2013 due to the poor international response; the Ecuadorean leader decided to begin oil exploitation in 2016. Global condemnation and bitter criticism, especially among indigenous communities from the Amazon region, spread out against Correa once the initiative was turned down.

Grupo Alba in 2015 was seen by political opponents as an operation of the government to control or capture oppositional media. In short, *El Comercio* didn't stop being very critical against Correa, although its opposition, as we will see later, was more sophisticated and rationalized compared to the visceral and aggressive fight presented by *El Universo*.

The sample, finally, was focused on political journalism and was designed to explore news sections and opinion pages. A section related to social and national news, titled 'Ecuador' or 'Society' in both newspapers, depending on the year, was assigned to collect stories about more broad issues. In total, 5 articles were selected from Politics, 2 from Opinion/Editorial pages and 1 from Society every month. During those years (before and under Correa) other sections might have brought more light, such as 'Economy' or 'Business' pages, but since the research was centered around the interaction between media and politics, it was decided to put all the attention upon what journalists and writers had been publishing about politics. *El Comercio* changed or used invariably the name 'politics' or 'current events'¹⁵³ in years 2015 and 2016, to cover similar topics in similar pages. As mentioned before, since the Internet access was so low in 2005, and the Communication Law didn't cover online publications, it was decided to only code stories from printed editions, which were usually better worked and presented and most of the times, signed by the author. This limitation to printed editions doesn't mean that the effects of Correa's media reform couldn't be reflected on the digital world, especially in 2015 and 2016. *El Comercio*

¹⁵³ 'Actualidad' in Spanish in the newspaper.

and *El Universo* are both among the most important sites that most of the Ecuadoreans chose to learn about the news¹⁵⁴.

2.1.- Variables

A set of variables was selected to observe expected or probable repercussions according to the theoretical debates summarized above and exhibited in the preceding chapters. In addition, as the main body of research in the field has been focused on ‘media populism’, references to the people and the people’s enemies were also addressed, observing how populist ideas were expressed in news media before, during and after Rafael Correa’s presidency¹⁵⁵. In total, nine variables were tested from a complex content analysis that followed fieldwork in Quito and Guayaquil in 2017 and 2018. The main work was performed by a single coder, familiar with local context, whose results were tested by an external coder; core variables held substantial and strong reliability¹⁵⁶.

The most complex and informative was the variable *source*, which considered those actors, cited or quoted, that provided the information for the piece, amounting to total of 40 categories; it was designed to identify the voices more used by journalists, evaluating the press’ diversity and pluralism. With a similar goal, the *subject* variable coded the main topic covered in the story, detected by the presence of sources, issues and iterations manifested in the article; the number of categories also reached a total of more than 40, later rearranged according to the most significant values.

¹⁵⁴ According to Mentinno, a local consultancy firm, and based on Alexa Internet data, *eluniverso.com*, *Ecuavisa.com* and *elcomercio.com* were the top three most visited sites on the Internet in 2015.

¹⁵⁵ We have already utilized content analysis examining media populism in chapter 2.

¹⁵⁶ See more information available about those scores at the Appendix.

Additionally, the *tone* variable examined newspaper's stance regarding political actors, very important to evaluate the 'silencing' thesis; it distinguished between deferential, neutral or adversarial reporting, depending on sources and the perspective used in the story. A deferential tone towards the government, for instance, expressed the use of only government sources to address an issue, without including critical remarks, or the perspective taken in the article, explicitly supporting the government. The same rationale was followed to assess an adversarial tone; a neutral tone expressed a balanced presentation of sources and perspectives. The variable *target*, designed to investigate media's openness and diversity, classified the content into 'elitist' (made by specialized sources such as experts, lawyers, politicians, etc.), 'popular' (non-specialized sources such as ordinary people, social movement leaders, etc.), 'pluralist/civic' (a mix between specialized and non-specialized sources) and 'partisan' (sources that explicitly reject or support, a specific political actor).

Furthermore, a *genre* variable considered the different styles and writing skills, the distinction between news and opinion, and, indirectly, the "comprehensive" value of reporting, important to determine aspects of professionalization, according to Quality Journalism literature (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015: 17-18). Distinct genres denote different levels of difficulty; for instance, a *reportaje*, or in-depth story, can be deemed the most difficult and comprehensive genre, followed by chronicles and interviews. A hybrid category, 'analysis', which appeared in the politics section (and not in opinion) expressing writer's views on a topic, was especially useful to evaluate the performance of the formal distinction between news and opinion.

Observing more closely the ‘polarization’ premise, on the other hand, the study proposes an *ideology* variable coding ideological or partisan stances based on political actors cited, and on values presented in the story. There were thus two ways of assessing this variable: one based on the presence of political actors, normally used in news stories where sources were present and values manifested were not clear, and another one, centered on values expressed in articles (many of them opinion pieces) as they were specified in the Codebook. The ‘left’ was identified with progressive values, state intervention, distrusts in economic liberalism and focus on collective rights; the ‘right’ was linked to economic liberalism, praise of traditional values and focus on individual rights. Very often several political actors were cited in a story, left-right ideologies were mixed (for instance, support of traditional values together with distrust of the market) or not clearly identifiable political actors were cited (for example, political *entrepreneurs* without a neat ideological adscription, very common in the Ecuadorean context); in those cases, stories were coded as ‘transversal’.

Secondly, a *political parallelism* variable reflected the support or rejection of political actors and institutions. This study is aware about the limitations of the concept of political parallelism to be applied in the context of very unstable Latin American party systems (Albuquerque, 2013). That is why this variable has to be understood here not as a marker of an assumed parallelism between the press and party systems as is usually the case in Europe (van der Pas, van der Brug & Vliegthart, 2017), but as a navigation tool to observe over the years how relations between political actors, institutions, and the press evolved. As advanced above, the idea of exploring political parallelism in Ecuador to analyze

polarization under populism originated from the analysis of Southern European countries as ‘Polarized Pluralist media systems’ with high levels of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, pp. 129-131, 2004). It was thought that probably a sort of political parallelism would be expressed through content, reflecting, at the same time, polarized positions. To make this variable as systematic and objective as possible, only very explicit rejection or supports of a number of options were coded. For instance, when a political actor or institution (such as a leader, a political party, or the government) was celebrated in a story, narrating its accomplishments without delivering any critical information, the story was considered a ‘support’; when the article vilified an actor or institution without providing any balancing angle, the story was coded as ‘rejection’. Articles without clear alignments were coded as ‘non-parallelism’.

3.- Results: A Polarized Pluralist Populist media system?

3.1.- What silencing?

If we test H1 (‘Critical stances from oppositional media were suppressed with Correa in power’) observing the differences in the tone variable before, during and after Correa’s presidency, and the changes on the sources used among the different periods, besides what other variables (such as political parallelism, ideology or subject) show, *we cannot confirm this hypothesis by which critical or oppositional media were suppressed* once Correa consolidated power. The tone variable was not statistically significant comparing Pre-Correa and Correa periods, ‘neutral’ and ‘adversarial’ orientations got their highest value with Correa in power and ‘deferential’ reporting decreased slightly with Correa. These results

rule out solid evidence of a press that muted its criticism towards political actors, including the government. And actually, we will see in the following chapter that they present a clear contrast to Post-Correa values –which were statistically significant compared with previous periods– when the deferential tone increased, and the press seemed to openly support Moreno’s government.

Table 5.1: Tone variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	
NA	32 (8.3%)	42 (10.9%)	74 (9.6%)
Deferential	106 (27.6%)	84 (21.9%)	190 (24.7%)
Neutral	136 (35.4%)	147 (38.3%)	283 (36.8%)
Adversarial	110 (28.6%)	111 (28.9%)	221 (28.8%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

On the other hand, with Correa in power, governmental sources (central government and state agencies) and local/provincial sources increased sharply. This picture makes sense with Correa’s state’s expansion based on increasing social spending and investment in infrastructures and new institutions. Furthermore, the presence of *oficialismo*, or sources from politicians supporting the government, increased strongly, whereas right-wing politicians were quoted more, and transversal politicians, or political entrepreneurs without a clear ideological adscription, reduced sharply their presence. *Oficialista* citations may imply compliance towards Correa’s regime legal framework under which any story must be verified with several sources, government and *oficialistas* included, to avoid replies and rectifications from any actor involved in the story. But analyzed under the light of the previous variable this doesn’t forcefully suggest a supportive approach towards the government. ‘Anonymous’ or ‘unidentified sources’ were also reduced during Correa’s

period, and this may mean that reporters were more reluctant to use not clearly identifiable sources due to government’s replies and rectifications, that government or *oficialista* non-identified sources were unwilling to collaborate with the press, or that not fully verified sources didn’t appear in stories as could have happened before.

Table 5.2: Sources variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	
NA	78 (9.5%)	55 (5.5%)	133 (7.3%)
Government	109 (13.3%)	161 (16.1%)	270 (14.9%)
Local/Provincial gov.	43 (5.3%)	77 (7.7%)	120 (6.6%)
Courts and lawyers	54 (6.6%)	50 (5.0%)	104 (5.7%)
Politician right	45 (5.5%)	62 (6.2%)	107 (5.9%)
Politician left against gov.	49 (6.0%)	34 (3.4%)	83 (4.6%)
<i>Oficialismo</i> (left pro gov)	18 (2.2%)	83 (8.3%)	101 (5.6%)
Indigenous (political-social)	27 (3.3%)	37 (3.7%)	64 (3.5%)
Politician transversal	75 (9.2%)	34 (3.4%)	109 (6.0%)
Union leaders	3 (0.4%)	22 (2.2%)	25 (1.4%)
Business & financial	32 (3.9%)	28 (2.8%)	60 (3.3%)
Other media & journalists	2 (0.2%)	6 (0.6%)	8 (0.4%)
Experts/Analyst/Researchers	35 (4.3%)	48 (4.8%)	83 (4.6%)
Cultural figures & other	12 (1.5%)	30 (3.0%)	42 (2.3%)
Religious leaders	8 (1.0%)	5 (0.5%)	13 (0.7%)
Anonymous & unidentified	30 (3.7%)	18 (1.8%)	48 (2.6%)
Legal documents & similar	17 (2.1%)	44 (4.4%)	61 (3.4%)
Other	182 (22.2%)	203 (20.4%)	385 (21.2%)
Total	819 (100%)	997 (100%)	1816 (100%)

In sum, these results don’t clearly show a silencing or capture of the press under Correa, but a more complicated situation in which media performed a critical stance against Correa’s administration, but used or cited sources from the government because they had to, to avoid rectifications and sanctions associated on dodging those requirements. In other words, what they show is mostly an oppositional media that didn’t diminish their critical

reporting on the government (it actually increased) but was forced to introduce the version of the government in their reporting, even if, many times, that didn't shape the overall framing of the story. These required '*contrastar las fuentes*' or verifications (prescribed by the Communication Law) were not enforceable on Opinion pages which appeared to be fiercely anti-Correa and pretty conservative. In conclusion, it was mostly a sort of legal context that created stimuli that didn't silence the press, but, on the contrary, forced the press to not to silence the government.

3.2.- Polarization and political parallelism

The polarization premise expressed in H2 ('Polarization increased during Correa's presidency') may be consistent with and could explain more the results from the previous hypothesis. In any case, *we can confirm that polarization increased in news media content during Correa's presidency*. This happened mostly on the values observed in the *political parallelism* variable. Differences for the variable *ideology* before and during Correa's presidency were not significant, although they reflected a soft progression to the right in both newspapers –changes which, compared as such, were statistically significant–. In sum, with Correa in power both *El Universo* and *El Comercio* went slightly more conservative, although the high percentage of 'not applicable' and 'transversal' stories made these changes not statistically significant. It is very interesting to observe that the traditional ideological cleavage between left and right does not seem to work; this result may make sense in a country with a very instable political system, linked to the constant emergence of *ad hoc* political actors, and a high electoral volatility (Mainwaring, 2006).

Table 5.3: Ideology variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	
N/A	41 (10.7%)	47 (12.2%)	88 (11.5%)
Left-focused	30 (7.8%)	19 (4.9%)	49 (6.4%)
Right-focused	27 (7.0%)	39 (10.2%)	66 (8.6%)
Transversal	286 (74.5%)	279 (72.7%)	565 (73.6%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

Notwithstanding the low significance of ideology, the *political parallelism* variable, highlighting support and rejection of political actors and institutions, did reflect a fully significant polarization around one specific political actor: Correa and his government.

Table 5.4: Political Parallelism variable

	Pre_Correa	Correa	
N/A	319 (83.1%)	247 (64.3%)	566 (73.7%)
Critical on gov.	12 (3.1%)	38 (9.9%)	50 (6.5%)
Critical on Correa	0	32 (8.3%)	32 (4.2%)
Critical on politician	5 (1.3%)	8 (2.1%)	13 (1.7%)
Supporting gov.	11 (2.9%)	3 (0.8%)	14 (1.8%)
Supporting Correa	6 (1.6%)	2 (0.5%)	8 (1.0%)
Supporting politician	14 (3.6%)	12 (3.1%)	26 (3.4%)
Other	17 (4.4%)	42 (10.9%)	59 (7.7%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

Besides the neat rejection of one political actor once Correa is in power, there's a very interesting transition in the way *El Comercio* and *El Universo* show their relationships

with political actors and institutions, defining the polarization in the country. Overall, in years 2005 and 2006, both newspapers distributed more evenly their support or rejection towards the government; also, their support or rejection towards political actors was more dispersed; even Correa appeared to be supported in 2006 as we already noticed in chapter 1. The evolution of 'non-parallelism' cases (articles that didn't show explicit support or rejection) is also meaningful since they point out how stories displaying political parallelism increased with Correa in power and after the leader left office. All these values may reflect a transition from an absent or erratic political parallelism in news media to a clearer case of political parallelism centered on the polarization around Correa's government and his political figure. This finding confirms aforementioned theses connecting populism with polarization, and also may open a debate about the likely effect of populism in triggering a particular type of political parallelism. Albuquerque (2013), also working on Latin America, proposes two conditions to apply the category of political parallelism: "There must be a competitive political system, with political cleavages clear enough to allow the media to reproduce them, and an institutionalized relationship between media and political agents that is sufficiently stable." (743) Here, we can say that in 2005 and 2006 political cleavages in Ecuador were not clear at all, and the relationship between media and political actors was not as neat as it would be with Correa in power. As we will see in the next chapter, with Correa out of office, the rejection of his political figure remained, but now reinforced by Moreno's government, which seemed to constitute an 'anti-Correa' bloc with the press. In any case, there was a clear political parallelism between the press and political actors, and this occurred probably for the first time in Ecuadorean political history. If this phenomenon

–very common in Southern European countries and in some aspects in ‘liberal’ media systems such as the United States and the United Kingdom in the last decades– happened to be a negative or a positive change for Ecuadorean journalism is to be evaluated in the next section, but at first sight polarization should not be directly linked to bad journalism, and, on the contrary, the persistence of an allegedly neutral or objective journalism during the turbulent 1990s and 2000s in Ecuador should be more surprising than the existence of consistent divergent views on the public sphere.

3.3.- Professionalism strengthened: tone, target, public interest, and genre

Regarding hypothesis 3 (‘Populism under Correa led to an increase in journalistic professionalism’), after analyzing results from *tone*, *target*, *source*, *subject* and *genre* variables we have evidence to claim that *several aspects of professionalism improved during Correa’s period* confirming the views introduced in the previous chapter. Newspapers were more critical and neutral, as we have seen in the *tone* variable, and also the scope of both newspapers, their *target*, changed significantly during Correa’s presidency.

Table 5.5: Target variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	
N/A	4 (1.0%)	7 (1.8%)	11 (1.4%)
Elitist/Professional	230 (59.9%)	164 (42.7%)	394 (51.3%)
Popular/Populist	18 (4.7%)	13 (3.4%)	31 (4.0%)
Pluralist/Civic	105 (27.3%)	160 (41.7%)	265 (34.5%)
Partisan/Unbalanced	27 (7.0%)	40 (10.4%)	67 (8.7%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

Two elite journals in their context, very narrowly focused on political and technical sources, expanded their references. This can be seen in the way ‘pluralist/civic’ stories increased sharply in Correa’s era, with many articles using specialized and non-specialized sources, while ‘elitist’ stories decreased during the same period. ‘Partisan’ stories also increased during Correa’s years, which connected to the findings in the political polarization variable makes again difficult to support the hypothesis of a populist ruler silencing media. Popular stories (citing non-specialized sources) were higher before Correa, a fact that correlates with the surge of protests of that period, especially in 2005, extensively reported by both newspapers.

Going back again to the variable *sources*, one of the first trends to jump out when looking at data is the number of references itself: the sum of sources increased 22% during Correa’s regime. Indigenous leaders were more used as sources during Correa’s presidency, perhaps echoing the legal requirement for inter-cultural content; unions were more present too, as other media and associations, experts or analysts, or cultural figures, besides the military and legal documents. We mentioned some sources less cited above, such as

anonymous or non-identified actors and ‘transversal politicians’ in stories; to those, we must add ‘business’, and ‘courts and lawyers’, whose importance was reduced sharply under Correa.

Regarding the *subjects* present in the stories, several things also varied. Articles about government policies and actions were strongly reduced with Correa in power, as happened with stories about corruption and transparency, political parties and security/crime. On the other hand, stories about economic and social issues, education and arts, indigenous issues, natural hazards, media policy and foreign affairs increased. Perhaps the decline in stories about the government could be put in relationship with the expansion of the latter topics, especially with articles about the economy, social issues, and education, by themselves addressing government policies and actions although not as the major topic of the story, but in a secondary way.

Table 5.6: Subject variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Total
Other	57 (14.8%)	45 (11.7%)	102 (13.3%)
Elections (all kind)	70 (18.2%)	32 (8.3%)	102 (13.3%)
Government's policy, actions	40 (10.4%)	27 (7.0%)	67 (8.7%)
Laws, legal-process, courts	60 (15.6%)	54 (15.1%)	114 (14.8%)
Corruption, transparency	25 (6.5%)	16 (4.2%)	41 (5.3%)
Political parties and coalitions	11 (2.9%)	3 (0.8%)	14 (1.8%)
Protests (including coups)	23 (6.0%)	20 (5.2%)	43 (5.6%)
Security/crime	9 (2.3%)	7 (1.8%)	16 (2.1%)
Media issues and policy	3 (0.8%)	17 (4.4%)	20 (2.6%)
Economy & social issues	31 (8.1%)	51 (13.3%)	82 (10.7%)
Education, culture, arts	19 (4.9%)	28 (7.3%)	47 (6.1%)
Gender, LGBT	1 (0.3%)	3 (0.8%)	4 (0.5%)
Indigenous mov. & ecology	11 (2.8%)	14 (3.4%)	22 (2.9%)
Natural hazard, accidents	6 (1.6%)	27 (7.0%)	33 (4.3%)
Rafael Correa	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)	6 (0.8%)
Foreign Affairs	14 (3.6%)	26 (6.8%)	40 (5.2%)
Military	2 (0.5%)	13 (3.4%)	15 (2.0%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

The analysis of these results related to professional practices is complex. But if we look at the surge and diversity of sources, besides the subjects covered, we may claim that with Correa in power important topics were more discussed and some voices were better represented than in a previous period where political games stories were prevalent, something that matches higher levels of 'elitist' reporting before Correa. This could suggest that public interest issues were reinforced, and more organizations and social sectors had better representation in the press than before. On the other hand, the lower coverage of government actions and stories about corruption may indicate some type of self-censorship or limitation of deeper scrutiny on Correa's administration; although, of course, that could also indicate less corruption cases –in fact corruption coverage remained similar once the

populist leader was no longer president— and that, as mentioned above, reporting on government was mostly merged with other topics related to state intervention and economic growth, as the increasing citations of government officials and *oficialista* politicians may signal.

Finally, the evolution of genres from before Correa’s era is quite interesting. The number of ‘reportajes’, ‘chronicles’ and ‘interviews’, genres more difficult to perform than news releases, almost doubled with Correa in power. And a hybrid category, ‘analysis’, which appeared in the news pages (and not in opinion) was reduced to less than a half during Correa’s era. Additionally, there were more editorials published in the opinion pages and fewer external opinions, giving the impression of a greater editorial consistency within the newspaper, a feature that could also highlight polarization and political parallelism in those newspapers. Since in-depth stories or ‘reportajes’ climbed, the number of news releases, decreased.

Table 5.7: Genre variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Total
News	181 (47.1%)	152 (39.6%)	333 (43.4%)
Chronicle	6 (1.6%)	14 (3.6%)	20 (2.6%)
Analysis	19 (4.9%)	7 (1.8%)	26 (3.4%)
Interview	19 (4.9%)	25 (6.5%)	44 (5.7%)
In-Depth Story	45 (11.7%)	77 (20.1%)	122 (15.9%)
Editorial	11 (2.9%)	19 (4.9%)	30 (3.9%)
Opinion	85 (22.1%)	76 (19.8%)	161 (21.0%)
Other	18 (4.7%)	14 (3.6%)	32 (4.2%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

In sum, professionalism didn't seem to suffer in many aspects of autonomy, public interest orientation and professional practices during Correa's presidency, but mostly the opposite. Media's critical stance, the higher number of sources used, the addition of new actors to the public discussion, the more balanced use of sources, besides the purportedly more public service oriented agenda may have contributed to reinforce journalistic professionalism. Moreover, the writing was more complex and possibly better, as we will show further, transpiring not only a more refined usage of sources and selection of topics, but also a superior educational and writing skills in the newsroom. The jump in the number of in-depth stories, where several sources were quoted or cited and where reporters try to go deep into the context of current events, is quite impressive compared with reportorial work in 2005 and 2006; the presence of more in-depth (and quite critical) interviews appends the general perception of two newspapers that were better written and designed, and more original in 2015 and 2016.

3.4.- 'Anti-populist' media populism in a polarized pluralist regime?

The final research question ('How was media populism expressed in content with or without Correa?') deals with how populist ideas expressed in Ecuadorean media were affected by the presence or absence of a populist president. There were several options to code 'people' in Spanish with a positive meaning, from the more general *pueblo* to more specific types such as *patria*, *voluntad popular* or *nación*. 'People' references could have also a negative and neutral connotation. Something similar was thought for the 'enemy variable'; several options were available, from the more classical 'the rich', 'oligarchies' or

‘the political class’, to more specific, such as ‘Rafael Correa’; outgroups such as the indigenous people or immigrants were introduced as ‘enemy’ categories.

Table 5.8: People variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Total
No mentions	344 (89.6%)	327 (85.2%)	671(87.4%)
Positive	18 (4.7%)	23 (6.0%)	41 (5.3%)
Negative	0	0	0
Positive (as nation)	3 (0.8%)	5 (1.3%)	8 (1.0%)
Positive (as citizenship)	3 (0.8%)	0	3 (0.4%)
Positive (native people)	3 (0.8%)	8 (2.1%)	11 (1.4%)
People neutral	9 (2.3%)	21 (5.5%)	30 (3.9%)
Other	4 (1.1%)	0	4 (0.5%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)
Positive total	24 (7.1%)	28 (9.4%)	52 (8.1%)

About populist ideas in both newspapers one thing must be stressed from the beginning. There were very few references, something that is consistent with the nature of *El Comercio* and *El Universo* as elite media and with studies considering the tabloid format, which these media are not, “as the most important media predictor for the extent and nature of populism in the news” (Wettstein et al, 2018; 491). However, there were some ‘people’ mentions in all these years, and during Correa’s presidency the ‘people’ was more quoted in news and opinion articles by both newspapers. It was referred to in a different way though. Whereas in the former period ‘people’ was mostly a positive reference speaking about the nation and citizenship; in Correa’s era, ‘people’ was mostly a positive-neutral reference

speaking usually about specific populations (indigenous nationalities or *pueblos originarios*) or just in general terms.

Table 5.9: Enemy variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Total
N/A	359 (93.5%)	372 (96.9%)	731 (95.2%)
Rich/Oligarchy	3 (0.8%)	0	3 (0.4%)
Political class	19 (4.9%)	1 (0.3%)	20 (2.6%)
Correa	0	8 (2.1%)	8 (1.0%)
Corrupts	3 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)	6 (0.8%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	768 (100%)

Looking at the ‘enemy’ references, the most striking feature is their low number, but there are differences, perhaps explained by the political context of each period. Before Correa, the enemy was the ‘rich’ and, mostly, the ‘political class’, as we already analyzed in length in chapter 1, whereas during Correa’s presidency, it was the populist president himself; Correa himself appeared to be, in the scarce references available, the enemy of the people for those writing in the newspaper. The years with most enemies’ references were 2005 and 2006, a ‘populist biennium’, one might say, by the combined number of ‘people’ and ‘enemy’ references. These results suggest a correlation between the political regime and media populism, which would be a case of *populism through the media*, with a leftist tone, in the first period (before Correa) and not so clearly in the second, due to neutral references and the nature of the ‘enemy’. Under Correa, mostly, what content shows is a usage of populist rhetoric that apparently may be at odds with the populist logic (hence the large

number of neutral references to the people) or may create a sort of ‘antipopulist populism’ that recreates the enemy of the nation in the figure of the populist leader, transformed into some sort of authoritarian *caudillo* against whom the people must revolt.

This contradictory evidence is perhaps understandable through the lens of the rise of a consistent political parallelism in the Ecuadorean press under Correa, creating a sort of Polarized Pluralist Populist media system. And this suggests an interesting argument about populism in power or outside power. That thesis claims that when a deep representation crisis occurs, such as the Forajidos Revolt in 2005, and the current or successive governments are not controlled by ‘full populist leaders’ (actually doing what they promised to some extent once in power¹⁵⁷), populism happens to be reflected in the press in a more transversal way, even as a progressive force in conservative newspapers. But, once a full populist leader is in power, or starts to be critically influential, actually addressing problems as a populist politician –trying to change the political system and to implement new policies–, this transversal landscape collapses into opposed camps, creating a clear and sometimes new political parallelism. How this ‘populist’ political parallelism is reflected in cases similar or different from the Ecuadorean case exceeds the scope of this study, but this is an important question, and some consistent arguments may arise. Many Latin American ‘Liberal-Captured’ media systems (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014) might be

¹⁵⁷ This is reminder that not all politicians that claim to be populist or to represent the will of the people during an electoral campaign can actually be labeled as populist once in power. For instance, outsiders Abdalá Bucaram and Lucio Gutiérrez based their electoral platforms on consistent populist rhetoric, but once elected presidents they exerted power as usual, implementing the same neoliberal agenda and reaching agreements with the established political parties or with powerful domestic and international institutions. Neither of those two ‘populist’ leaders presented a clear challenge to the Ecuadorean political system, let alone to the traditional economic or media *status quo*. Using the academic jargon, they are cases of ‘empty’ populism (Jagers and Walgrave 2007) but not only due to their rhetoric, but because of the content of their policies once in power, hence the use of the term ‘full’ populist in our research.

understood following Ecuador's pattern, but also other instances with clear populist phenomena: Donald Trump's United States, Brexit's United Kingdom or ethnonationalist governments in Eastern European countries might share some traits of a transversal media populism that turns into polarized political parallelisms once the populist leader is in power or at least turns out to be very influential over the political system.

4.- In-depth analysis: From an elitist reporting to a critical 'corporatist' journalism

Once we have discussed the more 'on the surface' or quantitative results from content analysis, addressing specific hypotheses and questions, we can go further exploring how that content actually looks like. In doing so, this level of analysis may elicit a more comprehensive approach towards the real work that journalists were doing during the politico-institutional transformation and thus supplement consistently both the quantitative and qualitative data already introduced. In fact, the articles analyzed here, randomly selected from the sample that supported the content analysis, showed how two different types of newspapers seemed to emerge depending on the period producing consistent representations of what the content analysis results were pointing. As we will see, a sort of elitist although poorly professionalized paper dominated before Correa was elected, while a kind of critical 'corporatist' and more professionalized newspaper took center stage under Correa's presidency.

4.1.- Elitism, erratic parallelism, and populism through the media

The article ‘Jorge Montero deshoja margaritas¹⁵⁸’, published at *El Comercio* in March 2005, may be a good illustration of how elitist or specialized reporting worked in many stories in those years. To start, only individuals very familiar with the turbulent and dynamic Ecuadorian political system could understand the main framing and direction of the story. The diverse organizations, names and legal processes involved in an article that is presented as an atemporal chronicle, makes it especially difficult to understand what is going on, and what is the context of the article if the reader is not almost directly affected. Basically, the main theme revolves around a politician, Montero, member of one of the usual Ecuadorean ‘transversal’ parties, as they were coded in our analysis (political organizations with volatile vote support, holding blurred ideological stances and possibly with a clientelist operation), whose collaboration is key to pass legislation to suspend and change the composition of Ecuador’s Supreme Court. There is some information about the legislation necessary for that reform, and all sources are the several political parties supporting the reform and speaking about legal timings and quorums; views from the government are introduced in a text box linked to the main text. Since several parties and the government are represented, the article is a clear example of a ‘transversal’ story, and the tone seems to be ‘neutral’. However, the main problem behind the whole story (President Gutiérrez’s appointment of a tailored Supreme Court months ago to support his administration¹⁵⁹) is not

¹⁵⁸ ‘Jorge Montero flips a coin’

¹⁵⁹ As explained in chapter 2, this tailored Supreme Court triggered the first serious backlash from the traditional political parties against Lucio Gutiérrez and his allies, including Abdalá Bucaram, the leader of the party to which Montero belonged. Nothing of this is reminded in the story.

mentioned nor explained, making the decoding of the story very hard for those deprived of the necessary initiatory knowledge.

In a similar vein, the article ‘Nebot y Palacio se elogian mutuamente¹⁶⁰’, published also at *El Comercio* more than one year later, in July 2006, maintains this type of specialized and decontextualized reporting. Although now the requirements to follow the story are not as arcane as in the previous article, the subject (local politics and government policies) and the way it is presented, still demands a high familiarity and interest from the reader. The sources are the public declarations of the Guayaquil mayor and the Ecuadorean president in an event that is narrated as a temporal chronicle, and there is not a clear argument about why the two political leaders meet or what are the stakes of that encounter. An agency or institution, the ‘Careg’, seems to play some role in the story, but nothing is said about that organism other than it “was delivered to Guayaquil guilds”; even the full name from which that acronym is formed is not provided. The story seems basically centered on narrating gestures and the alleged affinity between the leaders, so the reader, again, must decode the story to fully understand what the newspaper is trying to convey: Is there a new political alliance in the process and why? Do the two opposed leaders reach a key agreement on one important agency? Is this related to other important issues, such as the upcoming elections or key legislative plans? This story is also an example of a ‘deferential’ article, where the journalist supports the political actors’ actions and declarations without any major criticism.

El Universo of that era reflects a similar type of journalism, although professionalism and writing quality appear even worse in the Guayaquil newspaper. In the article, ‘El

¹⁶⁰ ‘Nebot and Palacio reciprocally praise each other’

roldosismo discute cambio de rutas en su contramarcha¹⁶¹, similar dilemmas related to *El Comercio*'s stories appear. The reader is required to have a profound knowledge of the complex Ecuadorean party system, and the story doesn't explain the context of the news. Even if some historical data of former demonstrations are provided, the reasons behind the main subject of the story (the organization of two apparently opposed marches) does not come up in any part of the text, which narrates the different views about these demonstrations in a quite chaotic way. Many parties and local officials are quoted, but there is not a clear common thread, and the structure is confusing; both headline and lead do not cover what the running text is telling, and it is difficult to classify the genre of this text which eventually was coded as 'news' instead of as 'in-depth story'. It is again a 'transversal' story with a neutral tone.

However, this kind of reporting, very common in both newspapers of that era, sometimes supplemented by some stories either supporting or rejecting diverse political actors, contrasts with what many opinion articles are telling about the Ecuadorean political system. For example, in the piece 'Quito por la patria¹⁶²', published at *El Comercio* in April 2005, four days after President Gutiérrez's deposition, a clearly populist story opposes the honest and rebellious people of Quito against the 'dignatarios'¹⁶³ disconnected from real life. It is the usual *populism through the media* formula common in those years: the people fighting an irresponsible 'political class'. The writing and structure of the text is quite problematic; the flow of the composition is contradictory and not well resolved (the writer

¹⁶¹ 'Roldosismo discusses changing routes for its counter-march'

¹⁶² 'Quito for fatherland'.

¹⁶³ Usually meaning 'high rank officials' in Spanish, the term comprises members of the government and political representatives in the parliament.

doesn't show a clear stance, criticizing and praising the same idea in different parts of the text, or finishing the whole discussion with a sentence contradicting a previous thought) and some grammar errors can be detected. Similarly, in *El Universo*, the piece 'Desarmar a los cínicos'¹⁶⁴, published in March 2005, before the Forajidos Revolt, holds the populist framing, but with less organization and focus problems associated to the writing skills of the author. In any case, the 'people' is here confronted again with a corrupt and cynical political class, perhaps more consistently than in *El Comercio* piece. The writing seems better, and the author supports a specific view and a policy proposal (to provide government and legal support to those willing to make bribery practices public) to improve corruption in the country. As was underscored in the results section for this pre-Correa years, corruption stories were more prevalent in the press, and this could be an example. Furthermore, in the concluding paragraph of the article, the author directly asks the readers about their opinions on the subject, assuming a sort of active exchange of views with the public.

In sum, an antithetical or contradictory general picture comes out of what these newspapers were publishing in 2005 and 2006. On the one hand, a clearly 'elitist' reporting style focuses on political games showing consciously or unconsciously a political journalism quite engrossed only on political actors and performing almost esoteric codes. Reflecting several political parties, stories are transversal or with blurred ideological lines, and the context provided is scarce to situate the news and events; grammar and structure problems are noteworthy as well. On the other hand, though, several opinion pieces address that political game as the main problem for the Ecuadorean people, introducing consistently (in

¹⁶⁴ 'Dismantling the cynics.'

spite of persistent grammar errors and structure and focus problems) a type of media populism where the ‘people’ is confronted against the political class. As other pieces would show as well, this populism is many times associated with an honest citizenship oppressed by the corrupt politicians and the oligarchies, and reveals progressive or leftist values hard to see in the same newspapers with Correa in power. As an example, *El Universo* published a piece originally circulated by the *New York Times* in May 2006, translated as ‘Una reorganización de gabinete inútil¹⁶⁵’, strongly critical with the Bush administration and its ideological position. This kind of editorial stories would be very different and scarcer with Correa in power. Populist content would change, and progressive or left leaning stories would come up less frequently, as reporting, in general, would be transformed under Correa’s administration.

4.2.- Corporatist pluralism, good in-depth writing, and anti-Correa conservative stances

With Correa in power and the Communication Law enforced throughout the country, many aspects in news content changed. Self-absorbed reporting on ‘political games’ continued, but it was less dominant, and many times politics was connected with other substantial topics. More sources were used and in a more diverse way; not only parties or the government took the stage in the stories, but shared the conversation with other organizations, unions, associations, or experts. Furthermore, newspapers now showed a neat ideological stance framing most of the content to oppose the central government and went

¹⁶⁵ Originally published on 17 May 2006 as the article ‘Saying No to Bush's Yes Men’, authored by *New York Times*’ Op-Ed columnist Thomas L. Friedman.

more to the ideological right. Interviews and original in-depth stories abounded, and grammar mistakes were less common; *El Universo* seemed still to be less professionalized in the focus and organization of some of its news content but not so much. For example, in August 2016, *El Universo* features a well edited, critical and extensive interview with the conservative presidential candidate, Guillermo Lasso, titled ‘Yo no he propuesto bajar los sueldos; eso es una barbaridad¹⁶⁶’ that beats many of *El Comercio*’s interviews. This genre, so central in modern journalism, was rare in 2005 and 2006, and when used, it displayed short and flat formats, normally consisting of one political actor responding to three or four direct questions without any substantial work of replies and counter-replies. It is interesting to notice that now –and even if this news organization editorially supported Lasso as a candidate–, the text doesn’t avoid newsworthy although uncomfortable questions, and it seems quite assertive and well conducted. In contrast, in *El Comercio*’s interview with Lucio Gutiérrez’s brother, Guilmar, leader of Sociedad Patriótica party, published in July 2015, we see a shorter and more simplistic conversation. Actually, this article made out of formulaic questions, works mostly as a partisan story shooting directly against the government and Correa. And it works as populist news content as well, since the interviewed makes references to the people and to an enemy, Correa himself, here characterized as a “dictador”.

In this period, most of in-depth stories appear to maintain a neutral or critical tone, presenting to the readers a relevant topic with more voices and angles than in 2005 and 2006. For instance, in the article, ‘Los movimientos apuntan a combatir el desempleo¹⁶⁷’, published in March 2016, a total of 9 sources discusses the common topic of the state of the national

¹⁶⁶ ‘I haven’t asked to lower salaries; that is a monstrosity’.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Movements aim at fighting unemployment’.

economy and unemployment before the 2017 election. What is interesting here is that not only the usual political actors – providing a ‘transversal’ stance, since the government and diverse political forces are consulted– create the story as it happened a decade before, but also more views, in this case drawn from opinion survey experts and political advisers, play a role in shaping the subject. And their approach is pretty balanced since they amount to half of the sources featured and contribute to the story with a sort of ‘expert’ narrative. By the same token, the article, ‘Grupos sociales y politicos ya hablan de pedir revocatorias¹⁶⁸’, published at *El Universo* in May 2015, presents a political subject but with a supplemental peg (the question of recall elections) that helps to frame the whole discussion. Here political actors are represented (two opposition parties and one *oficialista* mayor) but also a voice from an association (Asociación Latinoamericana de Derechos Humanos) and a reference to a campaign posted at Change.org to recall Quito’s mayor, shape the framing and target of the story.

On another hand, several articles make more emphasis on original perspectives stating, at the same time, consistent critical stances towards the government and its policies. In the story titled ‘Superintendente Carlos Ochoa advirtió a los medios cómo no debían titular hoy¹⁶⁹’, published by *El Universo* in June 2016, the formula of political actors in conversation with voices from civil society is repeated again, although this time irony seems to be the keystone of the article. Basically, the text frames some statements from Supercom director, Carlos Ochoa, explaining the institution’s annual report, to denounce this official authoritarian rule over Ecuadorian news media. The government thus is included in the story,

¹⁶⁸ ‘Political and social groups are talking about asking for recall elections’

¹⁶⁹ ‘Superintendent Carlos Ochoa warned media how to not headline today’.

but along with a sarcastic flavor permeating the declarations; the last two paragraphs of the story though are more serious with harsh sentences from Fundamedios, the journalism and press freedom organization, accusing the government of “massacre against private media”.

Other stories would provide more critical bearings against the government, in the news section and the editorial or opinion pages. Oppositional stands against Correa’s administration would be reflected in the news sections through investigative articles (for instance, around the purchase of a set of Indian helicopters that provoked more accidents than usual, according to *El Universo*), via allegedly neutral articles with a subtle critical angle (about the use of Cuban doctors by the government displacing local professionals, according to *El Comercio*) or through interviews with political actors, besides those cases of in-depth stories addressing issues with government participation but always expressing a position between a judgmental tone and a negative evaluation. However, in the opinion pages the number of rejecting adjectives against Correa and the government achieves prominent records. For instance, in the piece ‘Las ollas encantadas¹⁷⁰’, published at *El Universo* in June 2016, an aggressive opinion on Correa’s economic management dominates, and a vast of array of denunciations seem to merge in a sort of general accusation of “dictator” Correa “and his court” as corrupt “clowns”. Not a single specific case of corruption is introduced to support the general claim, and the whole thing works more as an enraged rhetoric against Correa and his followers. In *El Comercio*’s opinion pages criticism towards the government rules, although the tone is not as hard-hitting as in *El Universo*. Articles such as ‘¿Quién

¹⁷⁰ ‘The bewitched pots’.

decide?’¹⁷¹, posted in November 2015, or ‘Entre USD 20 y USD 200’¹⁷², published in October 2016, may represent adequately how this newspaper editorializes Correa’s administration and the Ecuadorean society at large. The first piece features concern about unlimited presidential election, and warning about dangerous authoritarian derives (citing Venezuela and former Soviet Union), the author makes a case against stances defended by *oficialismo*, but quite diplomatically and not directly labeling Correa as a corrupt dictator. However, references to the ‘people’ and to an enemy that this time is embodied by the government, delivers a populist content that, as it was explained above, reverses populism rhetoric against the populist leader. In clear contrast, the second article is a fact-based editorial page, written by a person with considerable knowledge in economics and oil prices, totally distanced from any populist logic. Wrapped in expert jargon and supporting his views on data and Correa’s own statements, the author achieves a consistent and compelling argument about a government which, by overestimating oil prices and by using wrong forecasting, is putting Ecuador’s economy on the path of bankruptcy.

In summary, during Correa’s presidency, both *El Universo* and *El Comercio* exhibited a similarly transformed reporting, and a distinctly nuanced criticism towards de government displaying many times a peculiar ‘antipopulist populism’. As for the change in professional practices, a clear expansion of complex genres, a more balanced use of sources, a more diverse (and better packaged) set of topics, and the original pegs for articles, speak strongly about an improvement in several aspects. I label this type of journalism as ‘corporatist pluralist’ in contrast with the elitism displayed in the former period. Topics

¹⁷¹ ‘Who decides?’.

¹⁷² ‘Between USD 20 and USD 200’.

appear now connected with social reality (and not only related to ‘political games’) and more voices are introduced, aiming to represent Ecuadorean society through parties, organizations, associations or social movements. In consequence, news content looks more plural and with a better collective representation, hence the inspiration on corporatism, a practice and ideology usually prevalent in continental Europe unions, which Hallin and Mancini (2004) use to define Germanic and Nordic media systems. However, criticism directed towards Correa and the government dominates many stories, in the news and opinion pages, with a different tone; more aggressive and visceral in *El Universo*, and more systematic and refined in *El Comercio*.

As suggested before, the combination of these two aspects (better reporting, representation and pluralism linked to a consistent criticism towards one political actor) seem to situate the Ecuadorean case under Correa closer to the Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist media models than to the Captured-Liberal media systems that possibly characterize the press’ structural situation in most Latin American countries, at least until the Pink Tide emerged in the region in the early 2000s. In short, contrary to what many scholars and voices in the public discourse claim about the negative effects of Correa’s media policies, the outcome doesn’t look problematic compared to the traditional landscape, and possibly this situation –improving aspects of professionalism, establishing clear cleavages in the media, etc.– could have been a promising first step to go further in a professionalization process with journalism and media institutions (public and private) progressively achieving more autonomy. But this will not happen, as we will see in the next chapter, and to the ‘Tide’ ride by Correa, with its bright spots and darker aspects

(authoritarian drives, vague legal concepts, capturing public media and governmental agencies), a conservative reflux would deeply restrict pluralism and professionalism.

5.- Discussion: populism, professionalism and media logic

In this chapter we have focused our analysis on the relationship between populism and news media content. And the main findings show that political polarization did increase in news content during Correa's presidency, whereas criticism from news media was reinforced and forms of professionalization also progressed. Media populism performed differently depending on the period. These results, contradictory as they may be, are consistent if we pay attention to the variable designed to explore political parallelism. This reflection suggests that a sort of stabilized political parallelism emerged in the Ecuadorean media system under Correa, reflecting a cleavage that was absent in the former period. This situation, which obviously has to be correlated with Correa's deep media reform, shifted private media's role, which positioned it clearly against the government, and it performed more professionally in some respects. The new political parallelism, additionally, was not clearly explained by the classic left-right ideological cleavage, but was expressed around a divide marked by Correa, the president, and the political figure. Consequently, media populism also behaved differently, first adopting the more studied form of *populism through the media* (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017: 367-371) changing to a sort of less explored 'antipopulist populism' cleavage during Correa's rule, characterized by a vaguer usage of the term 'people' and its paradoxical association with the populist leader in power defined as the people's enemy.

However, this analysis has also several limitations. First, this is a content analysis based on elite media and other media outlets should be brought to the table to have a more representative picture of the situation. Correa's regulations also affected television and radio broadcasters, and they underwent probably similar dilemmas; the previous chapter, in any case, may provide additional data and claims to support this chapter's main findings. On the other hand, online media were not covered by the Communication Law of 2013 and in 2005 and 2006 the Internet penetration was still very low, leaving a key question about the impact of Correa's policies (direct or indirect) over digital media open for further research, although some of the journalists interviewed worked on online outlets. Nevertheless, the *El Comercio* and *El Universo* samples do offer a key clue about the most prestigious places to work for a journalist in the country, as we already defended in the Introduction of this study, and in doing so, a picture about what the press of reference was experiencing during Correa's era. Other problems have to do with exogenous variables that probably also shaped journalism in Ecuador in the years covered, such as education or economic growth, driven and regulated, however, by the same populist government that was passing new and bold media policies.

In any case, this content analysis also solidly supports our argument claiming that populism influence on media may be far more complex of what is suggested in the public discussion and by some studies, contradicting mainstream assumptions on how media influences politics and vice versa. In the Ecuadorean context a strong presence of populism in institutions, passing key legislation, did not seem to harm media's oppositional tone and professionalism. There was polarization, and a divide of the public sphere, but the public discussion was not just degraded to a simple binary struggle. Content was enriched with

more sources; more information and actors were available, and the writing was more complex, as we observed in the genre variable. In other words, Ecuador stopped being a kind of a Latin American ‘Captured-Liberal’ media system to become a sort of ‘Polarized Pluralist Populist System’ where the press was more critical and professional towards the government. In some way under this new form, news media were more embedded in society, reflecting social divides, complaints and voices that were absent or very underrepresented in the previous period. On the other hand, issues about self-censorship triggered by government’s reaction to critical stories came up, possibly reflected in the increase of *oficialismo* citations, the lower number of articles about corruption, and the diminished usage of anonymous sources. It is certainly difficult to assess the depth of these insights through content analysis, but our previous qualitative analysis in chapter 4 supported *both* the existence of self-censorship and improved professionalism. The more logical conclusion to these contradictory findings is that, probably, Ecuador with Correa in power developed a regime combining higher levels of polarization with a political parallelism based on stances around Correa and a *sui generis* governmental imposed professionalism. As we highlighted above, this situation may be comparable, in some facets, to Polarized Pluralist systems in Southern Europe, with contexts marked by acute cleavages (different in the Ecuadorean case), combining political parallelism, mild levels of professionalism and aggressive governmental intervention (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 36).

This may lead us to the discussion about the specificity of Ecuadorean populism, how it may differ from other cases and how that may be translated into the specific relationship with the media and the state. Correa’s leadership seems to fit in a left-wing

populist category, presenting an inclination to a “positive freedom” perspective (Gandesha, 2018, pp. 61-63) that we already mentioned in the previous chapter, translated into a particular relationship of the populist and the state, including here social spending and media policy. Even though transversality defined Correa’s candidacy in 2006 –portraying himself as a ‘Christian progressive’, with conservative stances on Same-sex marriage or abortion–, his government was very quickly associated to the left in the region and in other parts of the world, especially in Europe¹⁷³. So, a very important aspect comes up about how the type of populism delivers a distinct relationship with the media. Accordingly, Ecuador’s features may not be present or adopt different characteristics in right-wing populist rulers, such as Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or Victor Orban in Hungary.

Finally, although that comparative research exceeds the scope of this study, a key question, I believe, surfaced in these pages and possibly in chapter 4: Is there a different mediatization of populism depending on the ideological leaning of the populist in power? The idea of a productive/conflictive feedback between populism and the media discussed previously emerges here in a counter-intuitive manner, shaping mainstream narratives even more than chapter 4. Improvement of professionalism together with the increasing

¹⁷³ From the very beginning Correa’s government, as happened with Venezuela and Bolivia, developed closed ties with some political organizations of the European left, especially in Spain (Podemos and Izquierda Unida, mostly), France (La France Insoumise) and Germany (through Friedrich Ebert foundation linked to SPD). To provide some evidence, CAPS, a political organization linked to Izquierda Unida coalition (including the Spanish Communist Party) and later to Podemos, was involved in providing advising and support to Correa during the 2006 electoral campaign and during his administration. Something similar happened with figures from the French left, such as Jean-Luc Melenchon and the Franco-Ecuadorean Guillaume Long who would be appointed Foreign Affairs Minister. Funding from the Friedrich Ebert foundation, on the other hand, can be observed in many reports, papers and political (and media) analysis published during Correa’s era, supporting very actively democratizing efforts in the Andean country, media policy included. It is noticeable that I didn’t observe anything of a similar vein coming from China, possibly Ecuador’s biggest economic partner together with the United States. Obviously links with Argentina and Venezuela were very common.

polarization and a sort of consistent and open politicization of the media system, possibly contributed to a better reflection of the Ecuadorean society, and all this was elicited if not produced by an incumbent progressive populist that shaped the media logic. This fascinating condition not only dynamites the apparently contradictory partnership between populism and journalistic professionalism: the assumed dissociation of politicization and the expansion and strengthening of key aspects of media logic, such as professional autonomy, is totally reversed as well. In Ecuador a populist in power created the conditions of a more independent private media, at least with regard to the government but also probably with respect to opaque links with specific private interests, and he did it by implementing an explicit political agenda bringing media to the political discussion. Going back to the more ‘classical’ mediatization theories, in the Ecuadorean context the order of factors seemed to have turned around, and media logics happened to be substantially shaped by the action of politics and the state.

Going back to the beginning of this chapter, Correa’s reforms, and possibly the fact that the president questioned media’s independence every other day, denaturalized traditional practices in the country, –such as that fuzzy border between the newsroom and ownership, the *tú* and *usted* in our descriptions from the newsroom– and transformed how journalists did their job in relationship with the Ecuadorean society. It was a tough polarizing change since it shook decades of conventions and very often adopted a vertical and authoritarian leaning; but it shaped media in some progressive manner. It could have been a good first step to develop a more democratic and representative media system, but, once the populist leader was no longer in power, those energies started to fade, and the reforms were

suspended. Ecuador, indeed, took a U-turn, as that article published in the Columbia Journalism Review highlighted, but not towards a more open and plural media regime. This problematic shift will be the main focus of the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6

“Nos regresaron al pasado”. Correa out of power: Anti-populist backlash and professionalism receding

Patricio Barriga arrived at the appointment at Flacso tired looking, taking little puffs from a vape that he hid in his suit’s pocket. I had interviewed the former Secretary of Communication under Correa from 2015 to May 2017, exactly a year previously, in July 2017, when he was working at Cordicom. As the government representative within the structure of the public agency, he worked in oversizing basic regulations such as media’s abiding on age-related, sex or violence regulations. We had a long and quite structured conversation at Cordicom’s headquarters in northern Quito. Barriga, dressing up in a suit and tie, was a formal, well-educated official, a good communicator, with years of experience employed in private and public media in Ecuador. He was a well-known ‘personalité’ in the Ecuadorean media environment, although his declarations and gestures were very discreet and legalistic. In my view, more than a low-profile politician, he was probably the quintessential rendition of the high rank public official, on the edge between politics and administration, able to use and re-use legal terms and elaborated expressions to make a point or to respond to the most intricate criticism. Only at specific moments in his discourse did he made explicit concessions to Correa’s most incisive goals, for instance, criticizing conservative hegemonic values expressed through media.

That morning at Flacso’s lobby, Barriga was a different person. He still presented himself as a polite, well-dressed, formal character, but apparently deep concerns were clouding his horizon. Unexpectedly, a common acquaintance from Flacso, Yolanda, a professor in the communication department identified with some of Correa’s ideological stances, who passed by the place at the same time of our appointment, ran into us. I noticed some tension or discomfort in the atmosphere once Barriga recognized Yolanda. “How are you still here with your line?”¹⁷⁴, Barriga asked the professor, caustically. “Yes, yes, I still follow the line”, Yolanda responded. To this, Barriga replied, “I’m no longer in the line”. Some seconds without words followed these utterances, and they looked at each other as if they were exchanging coded information. Barriga continued: “The margin is very thin, almost non-existent”. Yolanda’s facial expression reacted to these

¹⁷⁴ Original in Spanish. Pat: “¿Qué tal estás aquí, en tu línea?”. Yol: “Si, si, yo sigo en la línea, ¿y tú?”. Pat: “Yo ya no estoy en la línea... El margen es muy estrecho, casi inexistente”.

words with sympathy, showing solidarity. “Yes, the situation is tough”, she said, “let’s see how it goes!”. The tension between the two disappeared, as if they finally understood some kind of affinity between their respective positions.

Cases like the former public official and powerful secretary in Correa’s governments were quite common among political elites in Ecuador in the summer of 2018. Probably something similar happened in personal encounters and conversations among people involved in Correa’s regime. Suspicion was in the air that summer, after Lenin Moreno’s new administration had broken any bridges with Correa’s legacy to the point of enabling a sort of cleansing of Correa loyalists from government and state agency positions. That change, which nobody had foreseen less than a year previously, not only displayed a media ‘politico-administrative’ transformation in the country. It also produced a personal burden to many people who had inhabited the many ministries, secretaries, or departments of successive governments since 2007. Later in their conversation, Barriga explained more in detail to Yolanda how he was trying to surf the situation with the help of someone from within the party, Alianza Pais. Eventually he would be able to cope with the conditions and to return to the “line”, even running as candidate for vice-president in Alianza’s ticket in the 2021 election. However, by that time, Alianza Pais, the party founded by Correa and a handful of scholars, leftists, and minority political organizations in the late 2005, was rejected by Correa himself and his followers, who ran with another party, UNES¹⁷⁵, led by Andres Arauz (a former official in the last Correa administration) and Carlos Rabascal (a

¹⁷⁵ ‘Unión por la Esperanza’, a political coalition made of a number of different political groups, including Compromiso Social Revolucion Ciudadana, a party created by parliamentarians loyal to Rafael Correa that broke with Alianza Pais in 2018.

popular journalist and business leader). Barriga, and Alianza Pais, would repudiate Lenin Moreno before the 2021 election, which Guillermo Lasso, the neoliberal banker and presidential candidate since 2013, finally would win. Moreno, who according to available polls had between 14% to 8% approval rating¹⁷⁶, did not seek reelection.

Situations and paths such of Barriga's and what happened to Ecuador's media regime after Correa left office, are central questions that this chapter examines. Once Lenin Moreno, former vice-president between 2007 and 2013, came to power in May 2017, there was an apparently unexpected path change, and that twist had a deep influence in several different aspects, from foreign relations to economic policies or administrative reforms. Also, government and media relations were at the forefront right after Moreno was sworn in. This chapter, based on ethnographic work and the content analysis of the news published at *El Comercio* and *El Universo* in 2018, suggests that although Moreno's U-turn on media policy was welcomed by private media and domestic and international journalism and press freedom organizations, the result was a quite problematic scenario; news content and journalism ended up being less plural, diverse and open, turning the media regime into a sort of new captured media regime, with serious authoritarian stances, as we will see in the following pages.

Why exactly Moreno adopted that route, contradicting a decade of *Correismo*, exceeds the scope of this chapter; but that factor and the Correa regime's basic features, (positive and negative) will be explored here as well. Possibly the reliance of the regime on

¹⁷⁶ 14% for May 2020, and 8% for July 2020, according to survey poll company Gallup Cedatos. It is a stark difference with Moreno's strong support during the summer of 2017, which reached almost 70% of the population, a number didn't match even by Rafael Correa, who achieved 67% of an approval rating as his best score.

Correa's personal (and populist) leadership offers the most basic response: once the key figure was gone, the system collapsed, and this had important consequences for the media system. Moreno's government aligned with private media and the traditional political opposition attacking Correa's legacy, and a judicial hunt against Correa and his allies was declared. Additionally, all these abrupt variations would have an impact on the institutional setting; if with Correa in power confidence in national institutions increased progressively, including media, with Moreno's presidency a path of decline was strongly accentuated, creating a context surprisingly similar to that of the Ecuadorean turbulent cycle preceding Correa's victory in 2006.

1.- Correa's *compte rendu*: Constitutional refoundation, interventionism and a complex ending

Rafael Correa's long presidency had clear tangential effects in the Ecuadoreans' lives. The former Economics professor government practiced a committed Neo-Keynesian economic policy (Weisbrot, Johnston & Merling, 2017) massively investing in new infrastructure, social expenditure (notably in education and health) and administrative reforms that expanded the state's scope and structure in Ecuador in depths and intensity never seen in the country. The source of all that spending capacity would be, primarily, a crowded oil market (mainly spurred by China's economic growth needs) that pushed out oil prices for years with the only exception of 2009, the *Great Recession's* worst year. However, from 2014 onwards, the collapse of oil prices hurt the government finances and impacted over infrastructures and welfare investment.

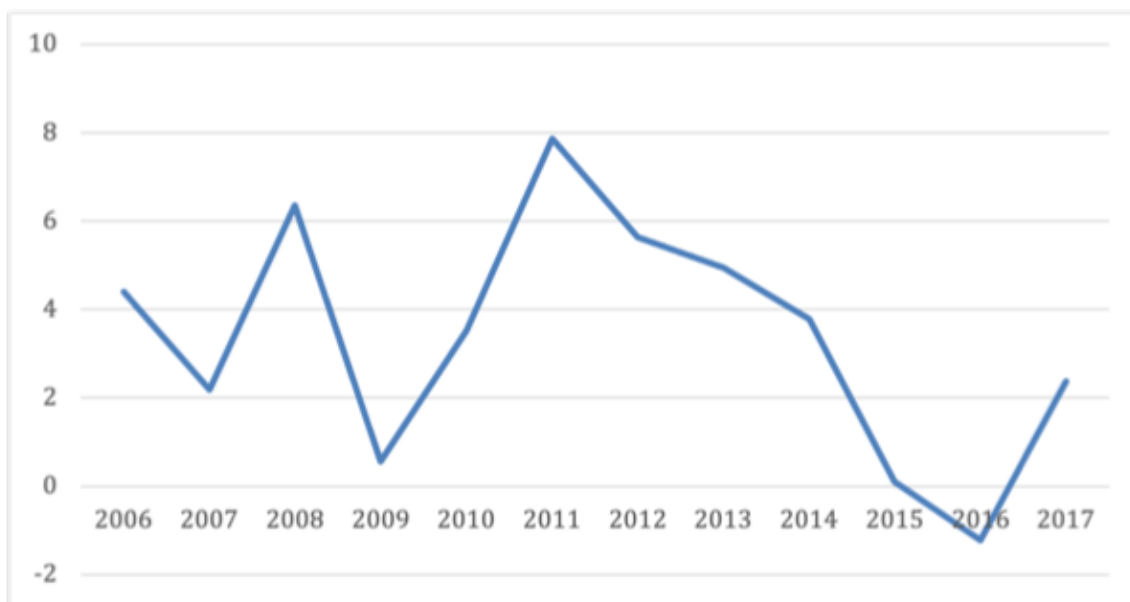


Figure 6.1: GDP growth (Source: World Bank)

Yet, Correa’s presidency was more than the transmission chain of oil resources towards public spending. After the proclamation of the 2008 Constitution, the country experienced deep state reforms and the government was put at the center of the economic activity. That determination, contradicting the neoliberal discourse, was implemented through several administrative reforms. For instance, the Constitution granted more regulatory powers to the state over a number of issues, from communication to the environment or the financial sector; also, the Constitution encouraged state’s proactivity, creating new public companies, if necessary, to provide the old and new rights guaranteed by the legal text. This ‘hyper-presidential’ regime, as it is framed by some authors (Corrales, 2008; Basabe, 2009; Freidenberg & Pachano, 2016; Meléndez & Moncagatta, 2016), offered some results, compared to the situation during Ecuador’s *ancient regime*. After Correa came

to power, the empowered executive branch did invest millions of dollars in infrastructure, healthcare, education, or social services. Images of a hyper-dynamic Correa inaugurating dams, refineries, roads, hospitals, schools, or new universities, profusely broadcasted by public media, illustrated this new world of an active state. Economic research and analyses from different ideological perspectives¹⁷⁷ (Weisbrot, Johnston and Merling, 2017; World Bank, June 2018; CEPAL, 2018) confirmed Correa's administration spectacular rise in public spending, and its positive consequence on social indicators such as the reduction of severe or general poverty rates, or the reduction of Gini index¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁷ Detailed information and, above all, objective/neutral assessments about Correa's economic and institutional reforms are difficult to find. In contrast, there are lots of clearly anti-Correa analyses too often providing information only about problematic reforms and failed institutional changes without delivering any knowledge of more successful plans or positive achievements. There are, of course, pro-Correa reports, although they seem to be quite few in comparison. Aiming to produce an analysis of what really happened in the country this section delimits its insights to conclusions provided by non-profit and left-leaning Center for Economic and Policy Research, 'pro-business' World Bank, and 'institutional' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC or CEPAL, in its Spanish acronym).

¹⁷⁸ Additionally, the above-cited analyses underscored a counter-intuitive low correlation between the surge of oil-industries and economic growth in the country, contradicting the general claim defining Correa's Ecuador as a populist regime fed by surging oil prices. Even the World Bank (2018, p. 22) highlighted this key aspect of the Ecuadorean economy, whereas the Center for Economic and Policy Research indicated that "rather, the government's increased capture from these activities, and spending it on public goods and services made a major contribution to growth" (2017, p. 8). This involvement of the state, in part achieving "substantial economic and social gains over the 2001 and 2014 period" (World Bank, 2018, p. 7) was also observed through tax collection and the reduction of informal economic activities.

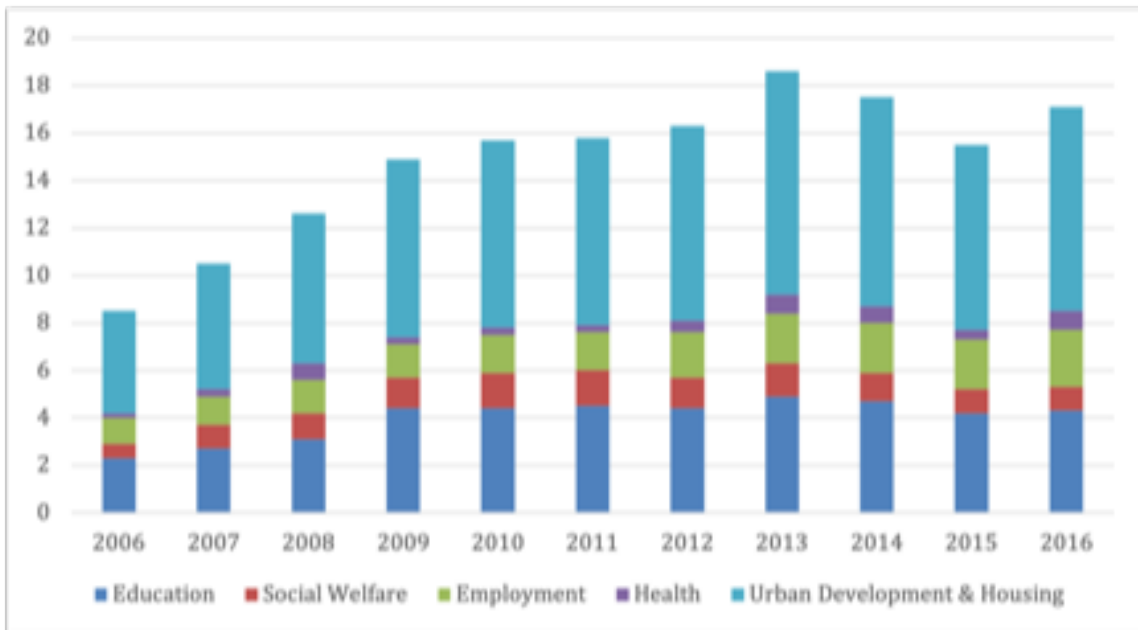


Figure 6.2: Social spending (Source: Ministerio de Finanzas, in Weisbrot, Johnston and Merling (2017))

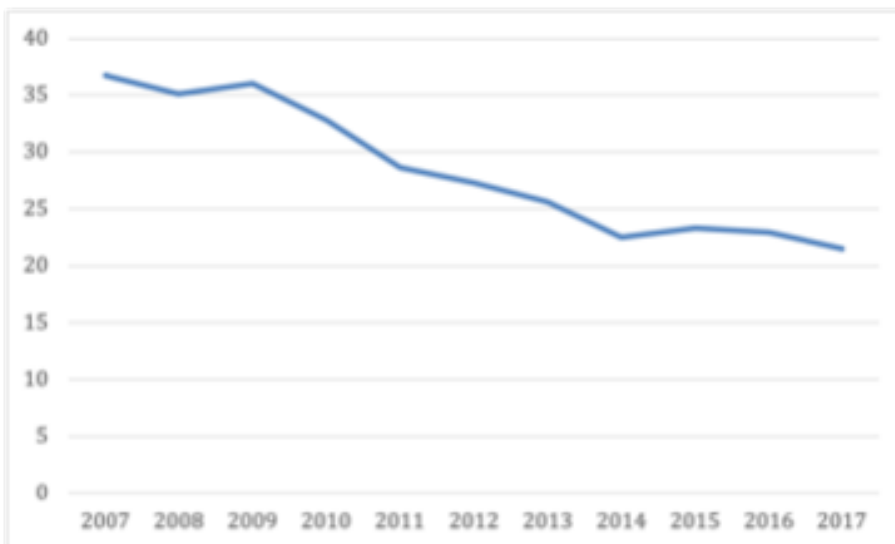


Figure 6.3: Poverty ratio % population (Source: World Bank)

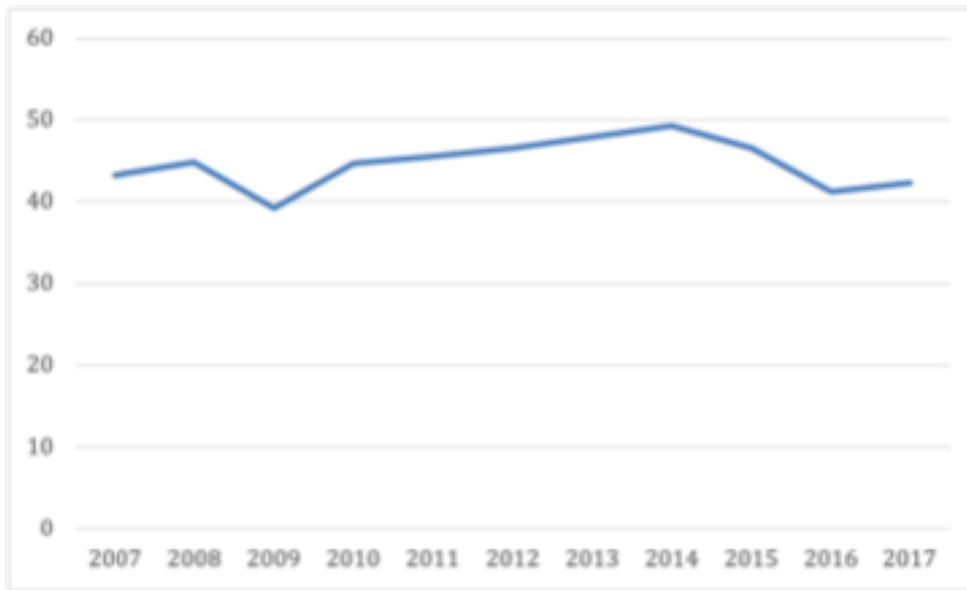


Figure 6.4: Formal employment rate (Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)

As we advanced in chapter 3, new institutions were created or reformed under the light of new constitutional principles, and almost any field was touched, from re-assessing the central bank’s functions to the social security’s agency relations with the state, basic and higher education’s new regulations and certifications, tariffs to restrict imports of specific commodities, and a long etcetera. The quality of these institutions is another whole discussion though. According to the World Bank’s analysts, the regulatory frame and overall institutional settings were unstable, and created legal insecurity and constraints to businesses. However, indicators of government effectiveness and political stability increased; the result was that “in this context, Ecuador’s institutions now represent a historic paradox, whereby the country’s reputation for regulatory quality and rule of law is very low, but its reputation for government effectiveness is high” (2018, p. 68).

1.1.- Expansion of media technologies

One aspect of that process of economic growth and increasing state intervention which is particularly important for this research was the expansion of media technologies in that period. In 2006, when Correa's candidacy platform pioneered the use of the Internet for electoral marketing, less than 7% of the population had access to the Internet. That number, which was a 7.09% in 2008, increased to 37.20% in 2017 (46% of the urban population) and 45.54% in 2019, according to Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo. The number of telephone fixed lines also increased sharply during the decade, according to Latinobarómetro data, and mobile phones penetration increased dramatically from only 42% of Ecuadoreans owning a cellphone in 2007, against 92% of the individuals ten years after. Smart-phone ownership also increased sharply and, according to Latinobarómetro, the number of Ecuadoreans possessing a smart-phone surpassed those who didn't in 2017. Computer ownership progressed massively too and connected to this, broadband usage increased 48.7% between 2005 and 2012 (Gehrke et al, 2016, p. 40), way more than in countries such as Colombia (24.19%), Argentina (17.94%) or Chile (9.55%); overall, subscriptions to fixed broadband between 2007 and 2017 increased 183% (Rivera, Iglesias & García, 2020).

This growth of communication technologies, a global and regional pattern at the end of the day, was firmly boosted by Correa's government from the beginning. According to the government data¹⁷⁹, fiber-optic infrastructure grew from 1,251 km in 11 provinces in 2006 to 8,689 km in 24 provinces in 2012; in 2015, that number ascended to 46,000 km. A new Telecommunications Organic Law was passed in 2015 to systematize the government's

¹⁷⁹ Senplades and Ministry of Telecommunications

goals. However, Ecuador was still far behind the most advanced Latin American countries in terms of new technology usage in 2020; mostly because of difficulties related to access of the rural population and to the overall cost of the services, which are still relatively expensive compared to the Latin American average (Rivera, Iglesias & Garcia, 2020: 26-33).

On another note, all these transformations had their logical impact on the existing media. Traditional printed press and generalist television consumption fell 50% from 2010 to 2020, according to industry sources (Del Alcázar, 2021, p.73)¹⁸⁰. However, those depressing figures for traditional media may rather have been transformed into new audiences and markets through the digital versions of the most popular newspapers and television channels. For instance, *El Comercio* and *El Universo's* sites were the fifth and sixth most-viewed in the country, according to Alexa classification for 2017, ranking in the third and fourth positions in 2020, whereas Ecuavisa, the private broadcaster, was placed in the ninth place in 2017 and 15th in 2020. In addition to that, cable television, traditionally consumed by a narrow percentage of the population, increased with 9.64% of the Ecuadoreans having cable television in 2009 to 30.44% of the population in 2017, according to Arcotel data. There are not data available about the development of radio consumption throughout the period; an important aspect since this medium has played an important role in the recent history of the country. Nonetheless, data from developed countries¹⁸¹ and views

¹⁸⁰ An interesting report about digital media trends in Ecuador published by the private consultant Mentinno in 2020 claims that 50% drop in television and printed press audience; their source is Kantar Ibope Media. The sharp decline of traditional media audience was also mentioned in the conversation held with Kantar Ibope's commercial manager, where a surge in consumption and advertisement investments in digital media was underscored. However, television's resilience as the most important medium in the country remains as an important factor in the equation. "Television has 88% of reach; it is the medium with the highest penetration. Television's consumption is of 4 hours and 30 minutes in average; it is one of the highest in the region together with Brazil" (Christian Luzuriaga interview).

¹⁸¹ <https://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/audio-and-podcasting/>

collected from Kantar Ibope in Ecuador¹⁸² would confirm radio's good shape in its traditional and digital formats. So, in summary, the technological transformation of Ecuadorean media happened to be similar to other countries in the region and abroad, with the differential factor of government's active implication in the development of the process.

1.2.- Trust in institutions

All those transformations explained above must have had an impact on citizens' confidence in national institutions. This perspective is meaningful to understand the context of important political changes in the media system since, as we observed in chapter 1, the deterioration of confidence in almost any national institution presented a strong correlation with the Forajidos' revolt in 2005, the full media populism moment experienced in those years, and eventually with Correa's electoral platform. However, with Correa in power, the process was inverted. The 'institutional decay' that started in the late 1990s switched to a different course between 2007 and 2015. We can see this in Latinobarómetro's 'confidence in national institutions' data. Almost any institution underwent a clear variation from 2007 onwards. It was not an abrupt change, but rather a consistent transition to a different articulation of Ecuadoreans' views on their institutions (Congress, Political parties, Government¹⁸³, the Judiciary, Armed Forces, Police, Business, and the Church).

¹⁸² Christian Luzuriaga Interview.

¹⁸³ Government here is a literal translation from the Spanish *Gobierno*, which only corresponds to the executive branch in most Spanish Speaking countries, Ecuador included. This is probably a French influence or vice versa. English usually doesn't differentiate between state and government, whereas in Spanish the state is the whole set of public permanent institutions (legislative, judiciary and executive branch, together with public agencies and state-owned entities) and the government is limited to the executive branch or the cabinet that rules the country for a period of time.

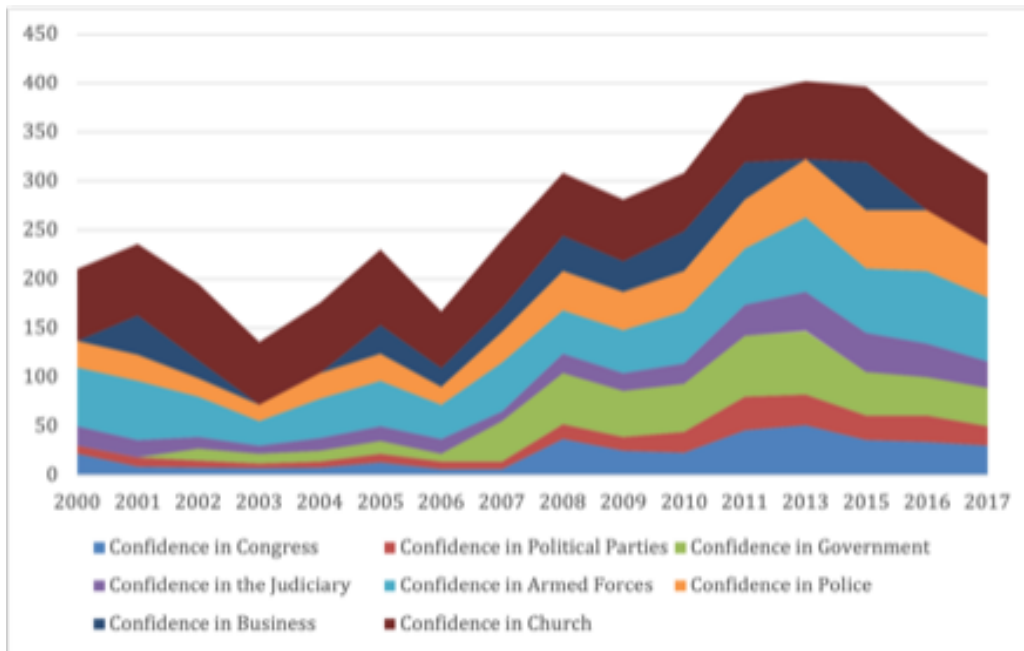


Figure 6.5: Confidence in institutions (Source: Latinobarometro)

As can be seen in the graph, which synthesizes the percentage of Ecuadoreans who view institutions with ‘much’ or ‘some confidence’, there were key moments in which those confidence levels suffered: 2003, 2006 and 2007. In contrast there is a particular year, 2013, where the Ecuadoreans trust in institutions skyrocketed, and Correa was reelected with 57% of the vote. Obviously, some conclusions come to mind easily, such as connecting Correa’s election as president in 2007 and the high figures of GDP growth, particularly between 2011 and 2013. But this was not just a success centered around the government or Correa, but a general pattern of increased confidence in several institutions, some of them in conflict with the populist president, such as private businesses, political parties, the judiciary, or police forces, which were a protagonist of the coup attempt against Correa on September the 30th. This contradictory situation of a regime possibly contributing to the stability of institutions with which it had a controversial relationship, was also reflected in the citizens’ confidence

in media. Prestige of the press, radio stations and television broadcasters never achieved such popular support as it did in 2013 and 2016.

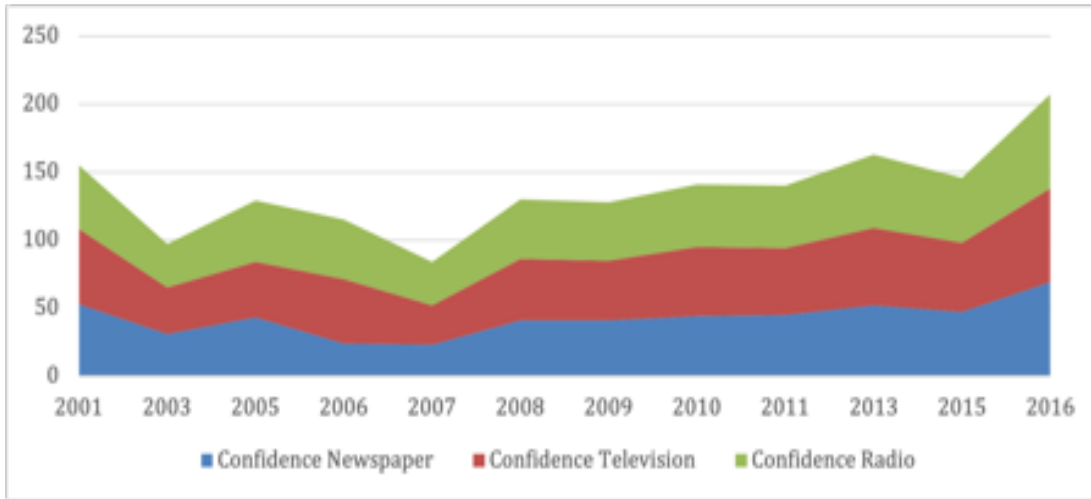


Figure 6.6: Confidence in media (Source: Latinobarometro)

Finally, and comparing these results with the context in which Correa and his populist movement emerged in 2005 and 2006, another interesting pattern emerged: Correa’s presidency correlated clearly with an increasing confidence in democracy as a political system, and Ecuador as a full democratic nation. Those results are plainly contradictory to most private media’s pundits who overwhelmingly qualified Correa as an authoritarian leader and Ecuador’s regime as a something similar to a dictatorship. Those results also challenge press freedom scores, international organizations’ assessments and the flow of research or theoretical articles defining Correa’s Ecuador as a ‘problematic’ regime, defined by a sort of “competitive authoritarianism” (Sánchez-Sibony, 2017).

1.3.- Decline

However, things started to change, progressively, after 2015. The oil crisis, triggered by a set of factors¹⁸⁴, hurt Ecuador's national budget in 2015 dramatically. In 2016, making things even worse, an earthquake¹⁸⁵ with a magnitude of 7.8 hit the country on April 16th. As can be observed in the data, there was a clear slope from 2015 to 2017 in Ecuadorians' confidence in their national institutions; although the decline was especially sharp from 2017 to 2018, with Lenin Moreno as the incumbent. Data about confidence in media were rather different, and the quality of these results, peculiar¹⁸⁶; in any case, it seemed that Moreno's presidency exacerbated the deterioration and didn't redress it; we will expand our analysis more about this aspect in the discussion section.

Finally, another important aspect possibly associated with the overall decline could be situated in the international context, rather unfavorable for Correa's government. Correa's international allies, such as Venezuela or Cuba, heavily suffered the fall of oil prices; approval ratings of Dilma Roussef's administration in Brazil fell sharply amid denunciations of corruption and government's ineffectiveness, and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner lost the Argentinian presidency in the 2015 elections. Additionally, Evo Morales, Bolivia's popular

¹⁸⁴ Including booming shale oil production in the United States and limited growth of key oil-importing emerging markets, according to the most official available data. See more at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/what-triggered-oil-price-plunge-2014-2016-and-why-it-failed-deliver-economic-impetus-eight-charts>

¹⁸⁵ As a result of the earthquake, at least 676 persons died, thousands were injured, the nation's economy stopped for several days, and the government asked the World Bank and the Interamerican bank, among other institutions, for reconstruction credits. See more at <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ecuador-looks-to-pick-up-pieces-and-rebuild-after-devastating-earthquake>

¹⁸⁶ Latinobarometro polls changed their questions regarding media institutions in 2016 and 2018 (disappearing in 2017) unifying citizens' assessment on media, so what were three different lines from 2001 to 2015 became a unique opinion on media. Furthermore, while the poll asked in 2016 for the assessment of media's job in the country, in 2018 the question focused about confidence in media in general.

president (who won the 2014 elections with 61.36% of the vote) was defeated by a low margin in a constitutional referendum on unlimited presidential terms, marking his first electoral setback since 2006. Donald Trump's unexpected election as president of the United States in 2016, and the subsequent tightening sanctions over Venezuela and Cuba deteriorated even more the situation. The discourse of a failed Latin American Pink Tide was firmly embedded in the regional and international public discussion in 2017¹⁸⁷. When Lenin Moreno, competing as Correa's successor, closely won the presidency in April 2017, Alianza Pais' victory was the exception to the rule of a regional landscape filled with defeats of the South American populist (and not populist) left.

Yet, the decline in Ecuador was soft or at least nuanced. Some economic growth was recovered in 2017 and confidence data didn't go back to the same levels before 2007 or even 2001. Thus, a sort of institutional stability was achieved when Correa left the presidency. But less than three months after Lenín Moreno came to power in May 2017, Jorge Glas, Moreno's vice-president in the presidential ticket, was suspended from his position and later put in prison due to his involvement in the Ecuadorean ramifications of the Odebrecht's

¹⁸⁷ Examples of this 'failure discourse' can be found not only in the most conservative media, but in many ideological stances and approaches. For instance, a center-right perspective is well represented in *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/opinion/latin-america-elections.html>), or in foreign affairs popular blogsites (<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/27904/after-the-end-of-the-pink-tide-what-s-next-for-south-america>); on the other hand, a center-left approach has been introduced in progressive magazines (<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-ebb-and-flow-of-latin-americas-pink-tide/>) while a more leftist view has been popular in many sites (<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/what-happened-to-the-pink-tide>). All these diverse approaches coalesce in their confirmation of a failure, their diagnostic being totally opposed, however. Conservative views tend to focus on alleged authoritarian attacks to economic and individual liberties (including press freedom), whereas progressive stances are more inclined to denounce attacks on individual liberties, the lack of improvement in new social rights (such as gender or LGBT issues), and the 'extractivist' and anti-environmental economic policies of many of the pink tide governments. The more leftist approaches are centered on the mild efforts in the region to fully overturn the region's political economy and its capitalist logic.

scandal¹⁸⁸. Other public officials who served in Correa's governments were accused of corruption and Moreno's cabinet, decidedly allied with private media and the opposition parties, launched a deep institutional transformation. In the meantime, a bitter dispute broke up Alianza Pais, the party that rose around Correa's candidacy in 2005-2006. Many prominent party members vowed their allegiance to Moreno's political project, very opposed to the electoral program presented by his candidacy for the 2017 election. Some other members remained loyal to Correa who, retired in Belgium, took an active political position against Moreno's first actions from the very beginning. In February 2018, a constitutional consultation was presented and approved by around 60% of the vote; Correa was allowed to campaign promoting the 'no' to some of the reforms proposed by the government. Moreno's administration was overwhelmingly supported by all the political class, Correa being the only exception. More corruption allegations and charges kept coming against high ranking officials loyal to Correa in the months after the consultation; the former president himself was accused of ordering the kidnaping of the opposition's leader Fernando Balda¹⁸⁹ in 2012. In the middle of the summer of 2018, doing more ethnographic work in Quito and Guayaquil, I could confirm that Correa's era was not only coming to an end, but its legacy was also

¹⁸⁸ Suspended as vice-president in August 2017 by Moreno, for "not being a team player", Jorge Glas was placed on pretrial detention in October 2017 and declared guilty in December of receiving \$13.5 million in bribes from Odebrecht. Glas' lawyers described the charges and decision as a farse, claiming that the only evidence against Glas was the testimony of Odebrecht's former CEO in Ecuador, who collaborated with justice and saw his sentence substantially reduced. Needless to say, this case, under these conditions, such as other accusations and trials against officials and politicians loyal to Correa, situated the Ecuadorean justice system in the middle of the political struggle, with the *Correista* camp denouncing courts being captured by Moreno's government and the traditional economic and political oligarchies.

¹⁸⁹ As we saw in chapter 1, Balda made his name famous in Teleamazonas television by accusing Correa of treason for presenting before the Ecuadoreans a 'fake' Constitution, different from the one agreed by the representatives.

being bitterly challenged. The discussion in the media and about the media at that moment was logically central for this transformation.

This was the context in which Patricio Barriga, the former powerful public official, and Yolanda, the associate professor of one of Ecuador's most prestigious universities, exchanged suspicious glances. The "line" that Barriga and Yolanda mentioned was a metaphor to name their positions and room of maneuver in the game of power that was taking place in the country at that moment, in the summer of 2018. A process of dismantling Correa's regime was already initiated, and nobody knew how that had could even been possible. Barriga, Yolanda and all the subjects interviewed for this study were surprised. Correa's former vice-president cut dramatically his bonds with the so-called *Presidente eterno*, and even supported criminal investigations to prosecute him, blocking the populist leader's return to Ecuador. "Moreno sought to slow down the tension and violence triggered by the [2017] presidential election. And he found a path which was the one of dialogue and in essence I think it made sense, because we were talking about a citizen's revolution without citizens, a revolution without social base, but basically clientelist. [A revolution] which in its goal to remove lobbies from the state, cancelled critical voices. . . Maybe that was one of the biggest problems: political education. . . But the turn made has a dramatic ideological inconsistency", Barriga explained the situation, sipping a coffee at Flacso's comfortable rooftop cafeteria, some minutes after his casual encounter with Yolanda. The sight was breathtaking. North Quito before us, with Ruku Pichincha's peak and its impressive 4,784

meters marking the possibilities of the horizon; a block of massive mountains physically defending or confining the whole city. “What we are witnessing is that interest groups are ruling public policy. . . We don’t have a president who makes decisions; business groups make decisions, his ministers make decisions, not him. . . It’s a 180 degree turn that lacks strategy; I’d venture to say that the communications secretary has assumed a kind of *laissez-faire* leadership, in which media, with their own agenda, are setting the government’s agenda”, concluded Barriga.

For other informants, the ‘turn’ was more pleasant though. In their view, Moreno was pictured as a politician who, worried about the lack of popular support in the 2017 election, tried to expand his base. Moreno’s first step focused on ending the war between the government and private media, celebrating a warm meeting with the main Ecuadorean publishers and producers at the presidential palace in July 2017¹⁹⁰. This was a total novelty of “the Great Incognita”, as one prestigious Ecuadorean journalist defined Moreno in his first months. As it was mentioned before, Barriga eventually coped with political turbulences in the country and even presented his candidacy as vice-president for the Alianza Pais’ ticket in the 2021 elections. The party received 1.53% of vote. These results were unprecedented for a party that had ruled the country’s legislative branch since 2007 and drafted the 2008 Constitution. Why this could have happened and how this transformed the Post-Correa media system are central research questions of the following sections.

¹⁹⁰ See more at <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/07/12/nota/6277198/lenin-moreno-pide-directivos-medios-que-prensa-sea-primera/>

2.- The ‘show’ without Correa: Moreno’s alliance with private media

There may be two main factors behind Moreno’s U turn after winning the 2017 election with a program promising to continue Correa’s legacy: one has to do with the intense personalization of politics that shaped the Correa era, and another relates to the international flow of events, as the Pink Tide governments were receding all over the region. To these basic considerations, a third point may be focused on the hyper-presidential footprint over the political system and the expanded role of the state in the national economy, media included. All these components marked Moreno abrupt shift, endorsing right-wing economic policies (including the ‘usual’ agreement with International Monetary Fund), a pro-American foreign policy (abandoning Correa’s steps towards a pan-regional international cooperation with new transnational institutions such as Unasur¹⁹¹) and a more pro-business/libertarian approach towards media regulation. All those political goals, by the way, were aimed by the political opposition, led by Guillermo Lasso, in the 2017 election, and explicitly rejected by Moreno, who narrowly won the vote. So, basically, Moreno, once in power, adopted the political opposition’s electoral platform.

That said, personalization of politics during Correa’s presidency possibly had a key impact on Moreno’s decision. As we have observed in this research thus far, Rafael Correa was the *Revolución Ciudadana*’s epicenter from the start – as a candidate, in a moment of

¹⁹¹ A transnational or multi-level state organization, similar in some respects to the European Union or more local experiences such as Mercosur, the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas, or Unasur, had its Constitutive Treaty signed up in 2008 by all South American nations without exception and reflecting very different ideological stances. However, ten years after, conservative governments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru suspended or withdrew their membership. Also in 2018, Moreno started to communicate his idea of Ecuador leaving what he saw as a failing and expensive organization, even if the institution’s headquarters were in Quito. Moreno’s decision was only contested by *Correísmo*, which saw this policy as a treason to Alianza País’ plans to work further on South-America’s economic and political integration.

low social mobilization, and later as the president— and performed as the embodiment of an idea of Ecuador. *Enlace Ciudadano*, the television show designed for and starring Correa, is the best example to put into perspective the enormous personalization process around a sort of ‘rock star’ president, hated and loved by the masses. Lenín Boltaire (sic) Moreno Garcés, in contrast, always displayed a low centrist profile, far from Correa’s academic credentials, debate skills or media/performance savviness. He assumed a quiet position as vice-president between 2007 and 2013, championing rights of people with disabilities, and endorsing the leader’s goals and stances. From 2013 to 2016, Moreno lived in Geneva, Switzerland, working as Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility. Few speculated that Moreno would emulate Correa’s influence on the country; rather, analysts thought of Moreno as a “transition solution” or as a “pro dialogue profile” until Correa could legally put forward his candidacy for the 2021 election. Moreno decidedly didn’t follow the former president’s example, nor let himself be ruled by political operators close to Correa, such as vice-president Jorge Glas, or former Communications Secretary, Fernando Alvarado. As a matter of fact, in April 2018, Moreno denounced in an interview in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that Correa wanted to use him to cope with the economic deterioration and later return to the country as the ‘Fatherland’s savior’¹⁹².

¹⁹² In a very interesting interview with Ignacio Ramonet, the legendary *Le Monde Diplomatique*’s editor-in-chief, Moreno made explicit his personal and political problems with Correa. One of Moreno’s answers reads: “I think that they made it with a perverse intention. Maybe they thought I wasn’t going to win the elections. They expected to leave the successor a very complex situation to later return like a ‘savior’. It was perverse what they wanted to do to me, very perverse. To a point that from the first day of my government they started to criticize. The ex-president began to criticize in his Twitter account.” More at <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/192000>.

The divisive nature of Correa's personal and charismatic leadership could also make that continuity extremely unlikely. A purist populist, with neat political lines between his 'people' and his 'enemies', Correa may fit as an example of what some authors (Conaghan, 2016; Waisbord, 2018) call 'delegative democracy', or a process that is "democratic in a plebiscitarian sense but not particularly liberal or representative", (Conaghan, p. 109) and that is usually led by a charismatic individual. But additionally, if we apply Pappas (2016, p. 4) 'index of *charismaticness*' we can clearly see how difficult was for Moreno to qualify as Correa full successor. Moreno's leadership failed to achieve any of the four dimensions¹⁹³ described by Pappas, whereas Correa fulfilled all of them. Moreno couldn't be the phenomenon that Correa represented; he had to be something different, or just wait and see the *presidente eterno* returning to power in 2021.

The second factor that very likely encouraged Moreno to shift his position has to do with the adverse international context for the inherited regime, already mentioned above. Surrounded by recently elected conservative governments in the region, and with Trump at the White House, the only remaining friendly country was leftist Bolivia, where Evo Morales lost a constitutional referendum on reelection in 2016. Thus, Moreno's perspectives to continue Correa's foreign policy were feeble and complex, and it was more than likely that the new president decided to go with the flow of events, following what appeared to be a solid conservative *zeitgeist* in the region.

¹⁹³ Pappas' four elements are: 1) Supreme control over party/movement; 2) unmediated & emotional leader-led relationship; 3) subverting by delegitimizing an established authority; 4) and constituting a novel authority structure.

Finally, *how* (more than *why*) could Moreno change the course of his political program and origins is another question that can be answered above all by the specific position in which Moreno found himself as president of a state that had seen its role and powers expanded as never happened before. In other words, Correa institutionalized a very powerful presidency through which Moreno exerted a dramatic influence on many agencies, sectors and corporations, from oil industries to media policy, telecommunications or state-owned companies, infrastructures and national projects. Therefore, the claim that the Ecuadorean political system happened to be extremely vertical was verified by Moreno's brusque shift, although at the price of Alianza Pais' split between Moreno's followers and Correa's loyalists. Yet, notwithstanding the expanding might of the presidency, Moreno would celebrate a key popular consultation to amend the Constitution a year after assuming power, fully accommodating his transition towards a new regime. All forces opposed to Correa, including traditional and new political parties, supported Moreno's reform, including a significant part of the indigenist movement. The consultation of February 2018, composed of 7 questions, included banning presidential reelection, additional protections for indigenous land in the Amazon, and the designation of new key public officials in a number of institutions and agencies, including the Attorney General and the Supervisory Board of the State¹⁹⁴. These designations, thought as a fast-track to *descorreizar* the Ecuadorean state,

¹⁹⁴ It was question 3 of the list of issues composing the consultation. This question asked the people for their support for the creation of a transitional Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control (Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social), a crucial public institution introduced by the 2008 Constitution and designed to name key public officials (in accordance with the government and the national assembly), including the Attorney General, and supervisory and management positions for several agencies and institutions, the electoral agency among them. This was the only question in the consultation (and therefore the key question that justified the whole consultation) contested by Correa and his followers, since the current Council members term hadn't expired and this type of designation violated the Constitution, according to Correa's camp. And

played a role in the purportedly real or fabricated corruption cases faced by Correa and his allies in the years to come.

2.1.- Transformation in the media system

Media was at the center in Moreno's shift from the very beginning. The president, now commanding a powerful public media apparatus inherited from the previous regime, dismissed Fernando Alvarado, Correa's right hand at the Communications Secretary from 2009 to 2015, from the cabinet, and decided to stop producing more *Enlaces Ciudadanos*. In July 2017 (a few days after Correa's departure to Belgium with his family) Moreno replaced key journalists and managers who had been running Ecuador's public media the last years¹⁹⁵. That month, Moreno also hosted a meeting with the main national publishers and media moguls at the presidential palace, and to surprise of the many, journalists included, promoted Supercom's standstill, calling for a reform of the Communication Law. Many of Moreno's first movements were well received by both conservative and progressive sectors, many of them close to Correa's political project. For instance, Fernando Casado, a Spanish-Venezuelan activist scholar who had worked many years on alternative

this was the question that gathered a lower support from Ecuadoreans: 37% of the voters rejected this reform, endorsing Correa's position.

¹⁹⁵ July 12, 2017 was the beginning of a wave of layoffs and resignations in governmental media that would last more than a year. See more at <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/xavierlasso-munirmassuh-orlandoperez-leninmoreno-medios.html>. That very day, in the morning, I had a long interview with Orlando Pérez, still director of *El Telégrafo*, about the changes introduced in the Ecuadorean media system during Correa's presidency. A well read and fascinating figure, Orlando (host of the popular show *En Clave Política* in Telesur when this study was being written) didn't transpire any sensation of fear or retaliation those days. One year after, in July 2018, he explained that he was offered a position at the public media conglomerate as an editorial advisor. "That promise was never fulfilled and here I am, I have this daily show at Telesur", he explained in our second long conversation.

communication experiences both in Venezuela and Ecuador welcomed Moreno's initial goal of reforming the law. "There were observations in the political program of the 2017 election; remarks regarding the Supercom that we all agreed. . . All of us agreed that in the second round of discussions about the Communication Law key modifications were introduced by the back door, modifications. . . that had harmed the law's quality. . . So, this man arrives to the government, starts a dialogue process that at the beginning was fine; he talks with people that were banned in the former government, but leaves aside many other groups. . . there wasn't a proper dialogue with everybody before the reform. . . Later what we saw was the government meeting private media bosses at hotel Quito and now what we have is a reform that denaturalizes the law. What we have is fraud!", explained Casado from his office at the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, a public higher education institution, in wealthy North Quito in late July 2018.

Not far from there, at Ecuavisa's headquarters in the Ecuadorean capital, Juan Carlos Aizprua, a popular anchor at the private broadcaster, praised Moreno's reforms. "The president has proposed a reform package to the Communication Law, and among them, Supercom's elimination. . . There has been a process of change, but I think is premature to cry victory", the young journalist elaborated. Asked about the reasons behind Moreno's shift, Aizprua's discourse moved around Moreno's remorse, the new administration's examination of the past, persecution, and political opportunism. "Moreno, himself, personally, realized what had happened with Correa. . . Excesses in communication, persecution of private media, and in the case of some members [of Alianza Pais party and government] who are still there and were already with Correa, it can be that at a personal

level they feel certain remorse. . . but there are others who, I have heard of, are being persecuted by this government. In some way. . . I would say that perhaps they have something hidden and what the government does is like ‘look, I don’t make public your file and you support what I am doing’. . . There is also the group of opportunists that call themselves leftists, socialists. . . but now when President Moreno has opened this dialogue process, they go with Moreno”.

Themes such as Correa’s authoritarian version of the Communication Law, Moreno’s fraud or remorse, the former government’s corruption, *Correistas’s* persecution or political opportunism were widely present in many conversations under different perspectives in 2018. Casado and Aizprua, in fact, may be two solid representatives of basic perspectives about what was happening in that moment. On the one hand, progressive policy actors and journalists working in public media, many of them critical of some of Correa’s policies, welcomed Moreno’s initial dialogue promises but were quickly offended by what they saw as the collusion between private media, government, and oligarchic interests, sending the country back to the situation that preceded Correa. On the other hand, private media journalists, more conservative policy actors, or any anti-Correa voice praised Moreno’s reforms, although without complete confidence on how much further the new president would go; these journalists were also surprised and captivated by the spectacle of so many politicians quickly shifting from being Correa’s hardcore followers to denouncers of Correa’s corruption. *Correistas’s* political persecution came out also very often in conversations; for those opposed to Correa the witch-hunt situation appeared mixed with endless and convoluted corruption cases, whereas for those closer to Correa, it was just a

plain case of political abuse from an authoritarian government supported by private and public media (now controlled by Moreno), oligarchic groups, the international institutions and “*La Embajada*”¹⁹⁶.

Casado and Aizprua’s professional and life paths in 2018 and afterwards may illustrate further these distinct sides. In August 2018, Casado participated in the political show *Hora 25* in TC television¹⁹⁷ together with Pabel Muñoz, a *Correista* representative at the national assembly, César Rohon, a representative for the conservative PSC, and Patricio Donoso, representative of the right wing party Creo. The main topic was the so-called *Ley Trole*, an ambitious law passed by the government and supported by current *oficialistas* and conservative parties that offered tax breaks and a more pro-business regulatory frame to overcome the difficult state of the national economy. At some point in the discussion –the progressive side arguing against the law, the right-wing side defending the need of the law–, Casado introduced a distinct topic, though connected to the ideological stance of the new legislation. The professor wondered if Lenín Moreno’s brusque change from his 2017 electoral program was not liable “to a type of false advertising offense, or fraud to the public opinion”. The rest of the show Casado continued his critique against Moreno’s mutation along with that of his ideological ally, Muñoz, recalling Moreno’s shifts on foreign policy and trade agreements. It was a passionate debate, an intense conversation between opposing sides in a country that had experienced deep reforms in the last months.

¹⁹⁶ Meaning, the United States Embassy in Ecuador.

¹⁹⁷ The full show is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjhLIDBowFo>

However, that show would mean more than just a vigorous dialogue. A day after Casado's intervention in *Hora 25* on August 13, *Apelagatos*, a website founded by antiCorreista journalists (including former *El Comercio* editor in 2005, Martin Pallares and Juan Carlos Calderón, interviewed for this study) posted an article titled "Why does a dictatorship's fanatic teach at the University?" exposing Casado's links with Venezuela and posting a video of Casado from 2016 praising Hugo Chavez in front of Nicolas Maduro. A Spanish right-wing tabloid, *Okdiario*, also published Casado's Venezuelan video to associate him with Podemos, the Spanish leftist political party, and their shared admiration for "the Venezuelan dictatorship". Notable Ecuadorean journalists, including the popular Janeth Hinostroza from Teleamazonas, posted that information on their social media feed. Some days after, on August 18, Casado received a notification from his administrative and academic employers at the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales: he was fired due to an academic restructuring. Casado, a tenured professor in Law and Communication, denounced immediately the situation. The Spanish-Venezuelan professor, holding Ecuadorean nationality as well, brought his case to the Courts and to the Ecuadorean Ombudsman, who, a year after the termination, urged the IAEN to readmit Casado due to illegal contract cancellation. Freedom House echoed Casado's case in its annual report with the following lines: "In August 2018, a teacher employed by a government agency was fired, which he claims was retribution for appearing on a television show and criticizing the Moreno government". In 2019, after working closely for some representatives in the national assembly, Casado accepted a position in a local university in Manabí, one of the most fiercely pro-Correa provinces.

Juan Carlos Aizprua's professional trajectory would be quite different. Working at the Business section at Ecuavisa daily news, Aizprua, a journalist originally from the Coastal province of Esmeraldas, increased dramatically his access to the new administration's high rank officials; Aizprua even interviewed President Moreno. He performed very productive work in 2018 as one of the most popular anchors and commentators in a year full of news about the national economy. However, he remained critical towards the government. "We are not harassed now, but I have to say something also about public media, about my colleagues working there. You see that pressure, that issue of coverages: they tell me: 'I was reprimanded because I didn't interview this Minister, I didn't tape that President Moreno's communication, Juan please can I borrow your copy because I will have problems if I don't do this? Yes of course take it' . . . And the scolding doesn't come from the media staff but from the Communications Secretary", described Aizprua. The following year Ecuavisa's Business editor was promoted, and in early 2020 he became the anchor of the influential Friday's nightly news show, one of the most influential and powerful positions in the company. His profile as a rising star appeared in other outlets in the country, such as the magazine *Vistazo* (owned by Ecuavisa's conglomerate) and Guayaquil's newspaper *El Universo*.

Many journalists, media policy actors or politicians close to the *Correista* camp defined mainstream media posture in 2018 as "media blockade", whereas others warned about a new kind of censorship in the country. A great number of progressive journalists were fired from public media, and the relationship between private media and government's

positive coverage sparked tensions¹⁹⁸. Casado's case, for example, a tenured professor fired from his position for avowing political opinions (something inconceivable in many countries), didn't receive any coverage from mainstream media, besides those *de parte* notes in right-wing tabloids, opinion blogs and social media feeds. *El Universo* or *El Comercio*, we will see in the following segment based on content analysis, geared their position towards a full alliance with Moreno's administration from their fiercely anti-Correa/anti-government stance of the previous years. In fact, comparing different historical periods, the private press' relationships with the incumbent administration seemed even more 'friendly' than before Correa's presidency. Those media outlets' conservative ideological position, exacerbated during Correa's period, persisted even if Moreno's government introduced itself as a type of social-democratic administration. Additionally, the improvement observed in the previous chapter over several aspects of journalistic professionalism ended up being damaged, especially in facets involving pluralism, openness, diversity and clear difference between opinion and news. Another key feature observed in the newspapers' content in 2018 and partially detected during the previous periods was a sort of peculiar populism turned against Correa, who was portrayed in several articles as the enemy of the Ecuadorean people. This 'all against Correa' movement remained strong and alive in the following years.

¹⁹⁸ Several journalists interviewed for this research were fired allegedly because of their closeness to Correa's government, their progressive stances, or their bad relationship with the incumbent administration. They were the former director of Radio Pública del Ecuador, Giovanna Tassi (very critical with Correa, on the other hand), Raquel Escobar (also working at the Radio Pública, progressive and very critical towards Correa), Orlando Pérez (*El Telégrafo* former director, very close to Correa), Arturo Torres (former *El Comercio*'s editor-in-chief and fiercely anti-Correista, ousted due to his refusal to censor cases compromising Moreno's government) and Xavier Letamendi, (*El Telégrafo* editor-in-chief, also critical towards Correa's media managing).

3.- Post-Correa content analysis: Anti-populism and decline of journalistic professionalism

Comparing news content from periods before, during and, especially in this chapter, after Correa came to power, we can observe how the change in the political, legal and institutional context may have been reflected in journalistic work. Following the same arrangement from the previous chapter, we see here how *El Comercio* and *El Universo* maintained their strong criticism against Correa, although now, with the new government, their content expressed a high support towards Moreno's administration. Once the Correa era legal-institutional framework was suspended, the results suggested, nothing similar to a better journalism emerged, but a more biased and less plural and diverse content. Actually, the transition between the Correa and Post-Correa periods appeared to show more significant results than in comparisons between pre-Correa to Correa years. At some point, the observer may even think, it seemed as if the government had been captured by the media's political stances –just as Barriga's claimed several pages above–, rather than the opposite, that Moreno's government used mainstream media to support its political agenda.

3.1.- Captured institutions and full alignment

Comparing news content with Moreno in power to previous periods, under Correa's presidency or before Correa, we can see how different and even estranged to former experiences was the Moreno era. And if in the previous chapter we concluded that we couldn't claim that Correa's Ecuador was a country where oppositional media were silenced, here we may suggest that there is evidence to think that with Moreno, media was captured

by the government’s political goals or rather vice versa, implying that the government was the one that eventually was possessed by a conservative editorial line and a frame which basically made of Correa and his former government the target of major and very often aggressive criticism.

Table 6.1: Tone variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
N/A	32 (8.3%)	42 (10.9%)	23 (12.0%)
Deferential	106 (27.6%)	84 (21.9%)	78 (40.6%)
Neutral	136 (35.4%)	147 (38.3%)	47 (24.5%)
Adversarial	110 (28.6%)	111 (28.9%)	44 (22.9%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. χ^2 6df = 27.47, $p < .001$ (N= 960)

Pre-Correa, Correa. χ^2 3df = 4.33, $p > .05$ (N= 780)

If we look at the tone variable differences between periods are visible at first sight and significant statistically, something that didn’t occurred before. For instance, ‘deferential’ reporting increased exponentially, way more than the values shown before Correa; ‘adversarial’ and ‘neutral’ content were thus logically reduced. Additionally, examining values from the ‘source’ variable together with results from other variables (such as ‘subject’ and ‘target’), we may claim that news content was more partisan, and possibly clearly biased, than in any previous period. As for changes on the use of sources, we can detect a realignment of the press, which now clearly reflected more conservative actors (increasing citations and quotes from right-wing politicians and business world representatives), diminished *oficialismo*’s appearances (even if now, *oficialismo* was apparently the media’s

best friend) and added more information from anonymous informants and ‘transversal’ politicians. Legal sources were also more present in a year where discussions about legislation, popular consultation and institutional reform dominated the public agenda.

Finally, if we observe differences on the topics covered, the new legal and political context appeared to be clearly represented by articles about legal procedures and legislation, topics which skyrocketed; however, stories about protests almost disappeared, and topics linked to education, culture and foreign affairs strongly decreased; something similar occurred to articles about the indigenous people and the military. In addition to those changes, ‘crime’ stories increased sharply, as it never happened before, featuring a subject that is commonly covered by tabloids, in Latin America (Hallin, 2000) and abroad (Pratt, 2006). ‘Rafael Correa’ emerged as a topic in itself as well, displaying always critical and even aggressive articles against the former president. As for the ‘target’ of the content, Moreno’s period is the one delivering more ‘partisan’ stories and the level of ‘elitist’ reporting increased sharply compared to other periods, completing a picture by which the media’s collusion with the government could be clearly confirmed, as it never happened before.

3.2.- ‘Asymmetric’ polarization

Another dimension extensively examined in the previous chapter, polarization, mutated and featured a new strain once Moreno came to power. We saw that during Correa’s presidency a relatively new phenomenon of a stabilized political parallelism took place in the Ecuadorean media system, along with a polarization defined, in its news content format,

by stances around Correa's leadership. With Moreno, that polarization persisted, but the political parallelism didn't, at least in the reflection or alignment of two political/cultural camps in the media system. As we explained above, public media were purged of progressive journalists (not all of them loyal to Correa), and mainstream private media persisted in their aggressive criticism against the leftist populist president. That context left *Correismo* dispossessed of any friendly media in the country, with some exceptions in remote localities or not too influential provincial contexts. So, in some way, media polarization in Ecuador worked almost as a sharp and constant criticism against Correa's legacy, with little or no replies from the *Correista* side; using the 'asymmetric polarization' term¹⁹⁹, introduced in American political science discussions (Hacker and Pierson, 2015), it seemed that an Ecuadorean version that type of polarization dominated the public sphere once Correa left office. This peculiar process was mirrored by the 'ideology' variable, in which content appeared to move further to the right than in previous periods. As with Correa, the variable altogether was not significant, but the differences between left and right, disregarding 'transversal' or 'non-applicable' values, were statistically significant.

¹⁹⁹ In the United States this notion most of the time identifies a type of polarization that is only experienced by one side in the American political spectrum, meaning that attitudes and values have remained stable in the more liberal sectors in the country over the years, whereas they have turned into more extreme stances in conservative groups. One of the last Pew Research Center reports, published in 2020, translates this into the American media system, where partisanship seems to be higher in the conservative media than in the legacy media camp. In this sense, something similar (although more severe) happened in Post-Correa's Ecuador: media went full conservative and partisan, leaving progressive voices (many times close to Correa) without a meaningful media platform.

Table 6.2: Ideology variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
N/A	41 (10.7%)	47 (12.2%)	24 (12.5%)
Left-focused	30 (7.8%)	19 (4.9%)	6 (3.1%)
Right-focused	27 (7.0%)	39 (10.2%)	19 (9.9%)
Transversal	286 (74.5%)	279 (72.7%)	143 (74.5%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. χ^2 4df = 8.41, $p > .05$ (N= 960)

Pre-Correa, Correa. χ^2 3df = 5.14, $p > .05$ (N= 780)

However, it was the ‘political parallelism’ variable that exhibited more in detail how this polarizing process played out. ‘Correa’, as a political figure, concentrated most of the criticism and it was the most repeated reference in the variable; in contrast, the government was solidly supported, dividing the spectrum in two camps almost evenly. Other politicians, most of them conservative, appeared to be supported, echoing the even more conservative inclination of the press. But, since there were no other mainstream media available or more friendly to Correa’s loyalists or *Correismo*’s stances, a sort of a ghost dominated newsrooms throughout the country without any material incarnation in the media system. Only after the election for local governments in 2019, a public radio in the Pichincha province fell into *Correista*’s hands, and even if in the digital ecosystem the cheaper business model and the lower government control might trigger some *Correista* influence, the results seemed to be quite limited²⁰⁰.

²⁰⁰ Andrés Arauz, the *Correista* candidate in the 2021 election, experienced a stark invisibility or negative coverage by mainstream private and public media. Only local radios and some digital shows provided some positive or more balanced tone towards Arauz’s candidacy, but not matching by far the other candidates’

Table 6.3: Political parallelism variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
No-parallelism	319 (83.1%)	247 (64.3%)	108 (56.3%)
Critical of gov.	12 (3.1%)	38 (9.9%)	1 (0.5%)
Critical of Correa	0	32 (8.3%)	22 (11.5%)
Critical of politician	5 (1.3%)	8 (2.1%)	4 (2.1%)
Supporting gov.	11 (2.9%)	3 (0.8%)	20 (10.4%)
Supporting Correa	6 (1.6%)	2 (0.5%)	0
Supporting politician	14 (3.6%)	12 (3.1%)	10 (5.2%)
Other	17 (4.4%)	42 (10.9%)	27 (14.1%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. $\chi^2 14df = 138.67, p < .001 (N = 960)$

Pre-Correa, Correa. $\chi^2 7df = 72.69, p < .001 (N = 780)$

3.3.- Professionalism receding and Antipopulist populism

This collusion between Moreno's government and the press had a negative impact on journalistic professionalism. If we look at variables such as 'target', 'source' and 'subject', combined with the information about media's increasing polarization and connivance with the government, the final picture looks different or basically opposed to that situation of full press freedom and free speech that some voices claimed after Correa left office. In the 'target' category, for instance, 'partisan' stories increased more than any other year, and elitist reporting, defined by the usage in articles of very specialized sources

support by many media outlets, including several alternative and community media who didn't endorse Arauz even in the run-off, censoring his relationships with Correa.

delivering many times very self-absorbed content, escalated although not reaching the level shown before Correa's era.

Table 6.4: Target variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
N/A	4 (1.0%)	7 (1.8%)	1 (0.5%)
Elitist/Professional	230 (59.9%)	164 (42.7%)	91 (47.4%)
Popular/Populist	18 (4.7%)	13 (3.4%)	9 (4.7%)
Pluralist/Civic	105 (27.3%)	160 (41.7%)	59 (30.7%)
Partisan/Unbalanced	27 (7.0%)	40 (10.4%)	32 (16.7%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. $\chi^2 8df = 38.43, p < .001 (N = 960)$

Pre-Correa, Correa. $\chi^2 4df = 26.61, p < .001 (N = 780)$

As for sources, the conservative drive was supported by an accentuated presence of right-wing politicians along with more transversal political actors. More prevalent business sources, along with the disappearance of union voices, added also more evidence to a further right-wing position move in both newspapers; indigenous sources were also almost gone, possibly because provisions of a mandatory inter-cultural content were suspended or not enforced. Experts, on the contrary, doubled their presence in stories along with citations of legal documents. Finally, anonymous sources, almost invisible under Correa, returned to be used in stories almost at the same level as the period before Correa came to power. This picture of a more partisan, conservative and pro-business and expert-oriented media, combined with low citations of *oficialista* sources and similar number of governmental

sources, confirmed the alignment or even collusion between Moreno’s government political goals and private press’ own unleashed political agenda, disregarding professional principles and practices adopted in the previous period, and hurting a balancing presentation of the news, besides the representation to all newsworthy voices in news content.

Table 6.5: Sources variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
N/A	78 (9.5%)	55 (5.5%)	33 (6.9%)
Government	109 (13.3%)	161 (16.1%)	82 (17.2%)
Local/Provincial gov.	43 (5.3%)	77 (7.7%)	13 (2.7%)
Courts and lawyers	54 (6.6%)	50 (5.0%)	26 (5.5%)
Politician right	45 (5.5%)	62 (6.2%)	34 (7.1%)
Politician left against gov.	49 (6.0%)	34 (3.4%)	15 (3.2%)
<i>Oficialismo</i> (left pro gov.)	18 (2.2%)	83 (8.3%)	21 (4.4%)
Indigenous (political-social)	27 (3.3%)	37 (3.7%)	5 (1.1%)
Politician transversal	75 (9.2%)	34 (3.4%)	26 (5.5%)
Union leaders	3 (0.4%)	22 (2.2%)	1 (0.2%)
Business & financial	32 (3.9%)	28 (2.8%)	38 (8.0%)
Other media & journalists	2 (0.2%)	6 (0.6%)	2 (0.4%)
Experts/Analysts/Researchers	35 (4.3%)	48 (4.8%)	35 (7.4%)
Cultural figures & other	12 (1.5%)	30 (3.0%)	17 (3.6%)
Religious leaders	8 (1.0%)	5 (0.5%)	5 (1.1%)
Anonymous & unidentified	30 (3.7%)	18 (1.8%)	17 (3.6%)
Legal documents & similar	17 (2.1%)	44 (4.4%)	31 (6.5%)
Other	182 (22.2%)	203 (20.4%)	75 (15.8%)
Total	819 (100%)	997 (100%)	476 (100%)

Note. $\chi^2_{34df} = 188.88, p < .001 (N = 2,292)$

Pre-Correa, Correa. $\chi^2_{17df} = 114.91, p < .001 (N = 1,816)$

The analysis of the ‘subjects’ variable delivered a similar context, with the interesting surprise of a spike in stories about crime. Many topics saw their presence sharply decreased, such as indigenous issues, education and culture, foreign affairs, media policy and the military. The number of stories about corruption remained basically the same.

Table 6.6: Subject variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
Other	59 (15.3%)	49 (12.7%)	29 (15.1%)
Elections (all kind)	70 (18.2%)	32 (8.3%)	11 (5.7%)
Government’s policy, actions	40 (10.4%)	27 (7.0%)	9 (4.7%)
Laws, legal-process, courts	60 (15.6%)	54 (15.1%)	49 (25.5%)
Corruption, transparency	25 (6.5%)	16 (4.2%)	9 (4.7%)
Political parties and coalitions	11 (2.9%)	3 (0.8%)	3 (1.6%)
Protests (including coups)	23 (6.0%)	20 (5.2%)	2 (1.0%)
Security/crime	9 (2.3%)	7 (1.8%)	15 (7.8%)
Media issues and policy	3 (0.8%)	17 (4.4%)	7 (3.6%)
Economy & social issues	31 (8.1%)	51 (13.3%)	30 (15.6%)
Education, culture, arts	19 (4.9%)	28 (7.3%)	7 (3.6%)
Gender, LGBT	1 (0.3%)	3 (0.8%)	2 (1.0%)
Indigenous mov. & ecology	11 (2.8%)	14 (3.4%)	2 (1.5%)
Natural hazard, accidents	6 (1.6%)	27 (7.0%)	8 (4.2%)
Foreign Affairs	14 (3.6%)	26 (6.8%)	9 (4.7%)
Military	2 (0.5%)	13 (3.4%)	1 (0.5%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. χ^2 32df = 132.96, $p < .001$ (N= 960)

Pre-Correa, Correa. χ^2 16df = 68.51, $p < .001$ (N= 780)

Finally for the variable genre, some formal aspects of writing also expressed the unleashed partisan twist in both newspapers. For instance, the hybrid category ‘analysis’,

almost absent during Correa’s years, resumed sharply its presence in 2018, merging opinion with news articles, for instance, in some commentary articles in the politics section. Additionally, the number of in-depth stories, interviews and chronicles fell lightly, increasing the amount of single press releases, marking possibly some strong professional inertia in journalistic genres, but also a probable decline of what happened to be a deep transformation on reporting styles under Correa.

Table 6.7: Genre variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
News	181 (47.1%)	152 (39.6%)	80 (41.7%)
Chronicle	6 (1.6%)	14 (3.6%)	4 (2.1%)
Analysis	19 (4.9%)	7 (1.8%)	10 (5.2%)
Interview	19 (4.9%)	25 (6.5%)	11 (5.7%)
In-Depth Stories	45 (11.7%)	77 (20.1%)	38 (19.8%)
Editorial	11 (2.9%)	19 (4.9%)	8 (4.2%)
Opinion	85 (22.1%)	76 (19.8%)	40 (20.8%)
Other	18 (4.7%)	14 (3.6%)	1 (0.5%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. $\chi^2 14df = 31.91, p < .05 (N = 960)$

Pre-Correa, Correa. $\chi^2 14df = 31.91, p < .05 (N = 780)$

Finally, comparing the way references to the people and the enemy emerged in 2018 with former periods, we may claim that the ‘Antipopulist populism’ that we detected in the previous chapter was still strongly present, with similar positive references to the people and, especially, with Rafael Correa depicted as the enemy of the people. The existence, for

the first time, of negative references to the people was an interesting finding that may speak about some changes in the discourse about the people and populism in the Ecuadorean media, although the very low number of references may make these data quite preliminary and weak. That being said, these results confirmed the pervasive criticism towards Correa's legacy and his political figure, even if since at least April 2018 Correa, immersed in the first judicial cases, established definitely his residence in Belgium and never returned to Ecuador.

Table 6.8: People variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
No mentions	344 (89.6%)	327 (85.2%)	156 (81.3%)
Positive	22 (5.8%)	23 (6.0%)	13 (6.7%)
Negative	0	0	4 (2.1%)
Positive (nation)	3 (0.8%)	5 (1.3%)	0
Positive (citizenship)	3 (0.8%)	0	0
Positive (native people)	3 (0.8%)	8 (2.1%)	7 (3.6%)
People neutral	9 (2.3%)	21 (5.5%)	12 (6.3%)
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. $\chi^2 14df = 40.83, p < .001 (N = 960)$

Pre-Correa, Correa. $\chi^2 6df = 15.61, p < .05 (N = 780)$

Table 6.9: Enemy variable

	Pre-Correa	Correa	Post-Correa
N/A	359 (93.5%)	372 (96.9%)	184 (95.8%)
Rich/Oligarchy	3 (0.8%)	0	0
Political class	19 (4.9%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.5%)
Correa	0	8 (2.1%)	7 (3.6%)
Corrupts	3 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)	0
Total	384 (100%)	384 (100%)	192 (100%)

Note. χ^2 8df = 40.57, $p < .001$ ($N = 960$)

Pre-Correa, Correa. χ^2 4df = 27.43, $p < .001$ ($N = 780$)

Other data, connected to those results, may be also very compelling. About 20% of the content examined in 2018 focused directly on Correa as a political figure or on Correa's legacy using a solid negative coverage. The former president and his shadow were everywhere, and always at the center of any wrongdoing or negative statistic in the country; in short, a new and invigorated 'us versus them' situation emerged, dividing the political world between media and Moreno's government (allied with many other political parties) and the *Correista* camp. It was, as Philipp Kitzberger (2022) suggests for the Argentinian case, a sort of 'Antipopulist populism' in which Correa was identified as the evil of all evils or, in other words, the main enemy of democratic Ecuador and its people.

In sum, with Correa out of power and a more than media friendly administration ruling the country, journalistic professionalism appeared to be deteriorated in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*. Both newspapers were more partisan, and many sources and subjects saw their presence clearly diminished, suggesting a more restricted public service orientation

along with a clear decline in the openness and diversity of topics and approaches. Furthermore, the more one-sided leaning was accompanied by a more elitist target, and an unabashed positive tone towards the government. As for the journalistic genres practiced, although some reporting styles persisted, the clear difference between opinion and news got blurred, resembling more to the situation before Correa, and the use of the most complex genres was slightly weakened.

3.4.- In-depth content analysis: furious against Correa, no matter how

It is highly informative to discuss how the aforementioned results were actually delivered in the stories published. A consistent pattern of partisan writing, disregarding meaningful voices, frequently merging opinion with the news, can be easily identified, forming a type of unleashed *de parte* journalism. In other words, in 2018 it seemed that a sort of ‘anything goes’ happened to be grounded in much of the articles published, framing Correa as a sort of evil character and supporting, quite blatantly, many of the protagonists and more conservative stances in this peculiar war against the, this time, “*década perdida*²⁰¹”, as some of the writers characterized it in their stories. Analyzing the abundant material, it seemed that two basic types of articles dominated political journalism in *El Comercio* and *El Universo*: a set of stories focused on criticizing Correa and his legacy through accusations of authoritarianism and corruption; and another collection of articles centered on defending Moreno’s government reforms and conservative ideological stances. In many cases the line

²⁰¹ ‘Lost decade’.

between opinion and news was quite blurred and, in some respects, *El Comercio* happened to be more lenient with the government than *El Universo*.

For instance, the press' enthusiastic endorsement of the consultation in February 2018 was perfectly reflected in stories such as the one titled, 'Jaime Nebot: "Tengamos reelección pero no la perpetuación en los cargos públicos"'²⁰², published in January of that year by *El Universo*. The article, illustrated with Nebot's photography, was a collection of declarations extracted from the weekly radio address of the almost 'eternal'²⁰³ Guayaquil mayor and leader of the conservative PSC. The only source of the article were Nebot's statements about what to answer in the referendum, explaining point by point his position, essentially endorsing the government's plan. No other voices or sources were presented. The only reference to the other camp (led by Correa) with a different stance regarding the consultation was a link available in the online version of the news which reads: "Rafael Correa says that he returned to the Ecuador only because of question 3 of the popular consultation". Another example illustrating this pattern of blatant support of specific political actors was published in February at *El Comercio*; the short article titled 'Lenin Moreno fue galardonado en Pereira, Colombia'²⁰⁴, informed about the President being declared 'renowned guest' of the Colombian city in which the two countries were celebrating a bi-national summit. The story was clearly laudatory and didn't add anything about the bilateral meeting or any shared issues or problems. This eulogistic piece, however,

²⁰² "Let's have reelección, but not perpetuation in public offices".

²⁰³ Nebot ruled Guayaquil, Ecuador most populated city, from 2000 to 2019.

²⁰⁴ 'Lenin Moreno was awarded in Pereira, Colombia'.

was not as celebratory as the story about the event published by state-owned *El Telegrafo*²⁰⁵, providing here a comparative analysis with a medium directly controlled by the government. In their version, the editorial staff who wrote the piece (the article is not signed, as *El Comercio*'s) not only offered information about Moreno's award but expanded the content with some remarks posted on Moreno's Twitter account; nothing was said about the issues discussed at the summit. Finally, the most complete piece of information of the event was the one published by *El Universo* that same day²⁰⁶. Headed in a similar way and signed by the editorial staff, the article started with Moreno's award and other celebratory considerations but followed up with more details about the summit's specific issues. *El Universo*'s tone regarding the government, slightly more informative and less propagandistic than *El Comercio* and government-controlled *El Telégrafo*, became visible in some other articles and this may have constituted a pattern. As it can be also perceived in the political parallelism data, although both Ecuadorean newspapers shared a consistent trend of supports and rejections, *El Comercio* was slightly more pro-government and *El Universo* more pro-conservative parties. However, as we discussed in chapter 5, those differences didn't produce statistical significance between the two newspapers.

Examining the other dimension of aggressive anti-Correa publications, we may see how opinion pieces boasted furious and exaggerated attacks on Correa's administration combined with conservative 'pro-business' ideological stances. For example, in February, close to the date of the consultation, an article in *El Comercio* titled 'Ecuador, Estado

²⁰⁵ See article at <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/politica/3/moreno-es-declarado-huesped-ilustre-de-pereira-y-recibe-distincion-honorifica>

²⁰⁶ See article at <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2018/02/15/nota/6624424/lenin-moreno-fue-declarado-huesped-ilustre-pereira-colombia/>

fallido'²⁰⁷ claimed that Ecuadoreans loathed Correa's corrupt regime, depicted by the collapse of the institutional setting established by the former president. The article cited the newly appointed Anti-Corruption National Commission's calculations of a cost of 30-40 billion dollars for corrupt deals purportedly created during Correa's era; the former president, according to the author, was "a fox guarding hens" in a "useless period", despite the massive wealth and popular support. In the piece, the author declared it was time to "cut the gangrenated organs with authoritarianism bacteria, corruption and mediocrity and to start to build Ecuador again".

Similar topics remain months after the consultation; by way of illustration, in May an author titled his article 'El año en el que la democracia regresó'²⁰⁸ at *El Universo*, defining Correa as a dictator or *caudillo* perpetrator of massive evil during long ten years. The story praised Moreno's political operation for the "elimination of *Enlaces* and by opening a dialogue with sectors not only forgotten but also persecuted", besides the elimination of "the confiscatory Plusvalia Law²⁰⁹" that the former administration had passed. The article also welcomed the reform of the Communication Law and the appointment of a new Finance Minister. To fully expound this type of critique, in April, another pundit also in *El Universo* emphasized the key institutional rearrangement provided by the February consultation and

²⁰⁷ 'Ecuador, failed state'

²⁰⁸ 'The year democracy returned'.

²⁰⁹ Also, in the 2018 consultation, the so-called 'Ley de Plusvalía' (Law on Capital Gains) was a tax reform intending to collect more resources from real-estate investment and income, especially among those individuals with several houses or properties. This law was at the forefront of the political and media fight in the country in 2017 for many months with the total opposition of the mostly conservative private media, and the support of the pro-government public media. Moreno included the repeal of this law in the 2018 popular consultation, possibly as a sign of his more pro-business pro-upper middle class economic policies.

the designation of a transitory ‘Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social’²¹⁰ that renamed key public officials. This Consejo, said the author, “has an extraordinary mission, outside and at the margins of the constitutional normality; a mission that. . . is of a huge importance to consolidate the rule of law. . . The new Consejo can’t be another organism and cannot be subject to the legal scaffold that the ex-dictator established and that resulted in his impunity. That would be to go back to zero”.

But not only opinion articles were producing this kind of framing or presentation of events such as the February consultation, Correa’s legacy, or the new government’s policies. News articles showed a clearly biased reporting as well. For instance, in December 2018 *El Comercio* published a news piece titled ‘La consulta de febrero abrió el camino hacia la institucionalización’²¹¹. In this story, signed by a journalist, the popular support to all questions was praised and almost nothing was said about the discussion of the reforms. Only in the last two lines of the article, the reporter annotated: “In the electoral campaign of this process, Alianza Pais led the yes campaign. Furthermore, it was joined by the rest of political organizations of all tendencies. Meanwhile the promotion [sic] was only made by politicians akin to Rafael Correa, who was in the country leading proselytizing acts. The consultation supposed *oficialismo*’s total split”. In the same vein, another news story, published by *El*

²¹⁰ This institution, Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social (Conseil of Citizen Participation and Social Control, in English), already mentioned before and fully examined in Chapter 3, was introduced in the 2008 Constitution as an additional figure of control of government institutions and contributing in designations of important positions on institutions such as the Attorney General, the Ecuadorean Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo) or the several Superintendencias’ leaderships (that is to say, regulatory agencies monitoring the financial sector, telecommunications, communication, etc.). In the 2018 consultation their composition was altered, naming a new transitory Consejo that renamed key positions until a new body was elected by popular vote in March 2019. Correa and his followers were against this change, which basically ousted officials named by the previous administration before their term was expired according to the Constitution.

²¹¹ ‘The February consultation opened the path of re-institutionalization’.

Comercio in October, praised the economic reforms, fomenting international trade, with an obvious laudatory tone in the heading and the sources used to develop the piece. The piece, titled ‘Ecuador quiere medirse con los países ricos’²¹², portrayed a victorious government (the article is illustrated by a smiling Moreno shaking hands with some high rank corporate executive) “looking for strategies for the private investment to fill the gap left by the reduction of the state spending in public works”. All sources backed the pro-trade strategy, including former ministers (of governments before Correa), financial experts (working for private banks) and a spokesperson from the World Business Forum, a private entity specialized on high-profile business meetings. Not a single source was provided to balance the eulogistic pro-business tone in a country that had implemented protectionist economic policies for years, and in which a meaningful part of the social and political field usually remained skeptical of international trade and the customary neoliberal agenda.

Finally, corruption cases linked to Correa or to any of his followers were a topic widely covered in news and opinion pieces. There were two big cases in 2018: the so-called ‘Caso Balda’, in which Correa was accused of kidnapping, and the ‘Gota Azul’ case, in which former Communications Secretary Fernando Alvarado was indicted for unsupported expenditures in the *Enlaces* production. Both cases emerged months after the February consultation, once new attorney general and other officials were designated, triggering accusations of political persecution. These trials were presented in the news in a slightly more balanced way than the previous topics, although very far from a neutral approach, especially in *El Comercio*, which displayed a more anti-Correa stance. For instance, in

²¹² ‘Ecuador wants to measure itself with the rich countries.’

August 2018, with the title ‘El fiscal apunta a Fernando Alvarado por 200 *sabatinas*’²¹³, a story in *El Comercio*, signed by the editorial staff, narrated basically the prosecutor’s version of the case without exposing the accused’s side. There were quotes of Alvarado’s lawyer, but only referring to details of the trial and not about the substance of the case, which dealt with Alvarado’s responsibility for accounting irregularities (unsupported payments up to 250,000 dollars, according to allegations) in *Enlace Ciudadano*’s production. In contrast, the article ‘Corte de Justicia tiene seis meses para insistir a Interpol por alerta roja contra Rafael Correa’²¹⁴, published in December by *El Universo* informing about the trial conducted against Correa was quite different. Signed by the editorial staff, the story summarized the views and details regarding Interpol’s rejection of arresting Rafael Correa, rebuffing the Ecuadorean judge’s decision. The piece presented all sides and substantial views on the subject; Balda’s lawyer view was introduced at the beginning, Correa’s lawyer went next, a declaration made by Lenin Moreno was also reflected, and the opinion of two legal experts (underscoring the weakness of the Ecuadorean court’s position) concluded the text. In summary, though not close at all to Correa’s position, the article seemed less biased, and possibly spoke of aspects of professional autonomy upheld in *El Universo*’s newsroom.

In conclusion, this more in-depth examination of those quantitative results obtained in the content analysis illustrates, quite neatly, how different the situation became once Moreno came to power and decided to push a complete amendment to Correa’s legacy. And, in general terms, it was not better. Notwithstanding Correa’s clientelist and authoritarian drives, analyzed in chapters 4 and 5, Moreno’s presidency preserved many negative aspects

²¹³ ‘Prosecutor aims to Fernando Alvarado for 200 *sabatinas*.’

²¹⁴ ‘Courts have six months to insist to Interpol for red alert against Rafael Correa.’

of the former administration and almost obliterated the positive aspects achieved during Correa's term. It was certainly a sort of return to the past, quite well reflected in data, but with the important novelty that this time the Ecuadorean state had a strong and effective presence in the society, and that had to have an effect in the media system, making, above all, easier for Moreno and his allies to control the narrative, 'el relato', after years of clashes between two apparently opposed worlds. However, quite meaningfully, the populist challenge, represented by Correa, persisted in the newsrooms, as a sort of a fight against a legacy and a ghost, exiled in Belgium but still perceived as the constant menace to normality. This 'Antipopulist populism' would be possibly one of the most logical mutations of that 'populising of the media' that we introduced in chapter 3, although now mainstream media's enemy was not in the political class or in government, but rather in the shadows.

4.- Discussion: the return of the repress, repressing

Rafael Correa left the country to his new destination in Belgium (his wife is of Belgian origin) surrounded by a crowd of followers at Quito Airport, on July 10, 2017. Less than three months had passed since the new government led by Lenin Moreno came to power. Correa had concluded his long presidency with a fair rate of popular approval²¹⁵ which was evidenced in his farewell appearances, always shrouded by a mass of partisans. His last interview in the Ecuadorean public television, with a strong impact in the public

²¹⁵According to Latinobarometro data from 2017, 66% of the Ecuadoreans approved Correa's last government, against 20% who disapproved; in 2016 those figures were quite different though: 50% rejected Correa's government and 40% supported it.

opinion, took place four days before his departure²¹⁶. It was a juicy conversation with friendly journalist, Xavier Lasso²¹⁷, who, by the way, was ousted from public media just two days after Correa moved to Belgium. This discussion was thus crepuscular and premonitory, an in-depth talk between a conciliatory journalist and an increasingly enraged Correa. Following a chronological summary of the former administrations' achievements and challenges, the conversation evolved progressively towards Correa's open animadversion against Moreno's first decisions. "The President's leadership is not the only one in the country", Correa responded after one hour of interview, elaborating more on his view that leadership was necessary in countries with low levels of institutionalization. Correa's sentence, however, was obviously connected to his differences with Moreno. Lasso re-asked: "Why did we get to this point?". Correa now visibly more anxious answered: "There are normal disagreements in a political movement. . . but I'm scared when I see some things, when some red lines are surpassed, when there is a call to dialogue with specific persons. . . You must know with whom you are sitting at the table, otherwise you are legitimizing the past. . . We were born, the Citizens Revolution was born, to fight against that country of the past".

Some minutes later, the host, resuming an appeasing tone, tried to understand how those animadversions happened, perhaps to find out possible solutions. "But Correa can't

²¹⁶ Correa's last interview in Ecuador's public media, retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lku-ebVj-pY>

²¹⁷A faithful Correa's ally, Xavier Lasso was vice-minister of Foreign Affairs for some months in 2015; before, he acted as Ecuador's representative at the United Nations and, above all, as a host of several radio and television shows in private and public media. Lasso, a progressive individual with his own alternative television show on Facebook since his separation from public media, is the brother of Guillermo Lasso, the conservative banker, leader of the opposition against Correa and Moreno since 2013, and president of Ecuador since May 2021.

leave Ecuador with this expression, let me to put it this way, of dismay; President Correa should leave the country with a bang²¹⁸”, elaborated Lasso. To this, Correa, visibly concerned, replied: “It’s rather another thing; I wouldn’t say disappointment, but perplexity of watching that strategy of differentiation [in Moreno’s government], that showing off, which indicates that it was the opposition who was right!”. Correa followed up that discourse until completing the farewell interview, making crystal clear his dissensions with Moreno. At some point by the conclusion, he disclosed the book he was reading at that moment – “A very complex book, *The Populist Reason*, by Ernesto Laclau”– and his plans to write two essays, one about the “reasons behind Latin America’s underdevelopment”, and another about press freedom – “the power without counter-power is going to be the title”, Correa said.

Shortly after this interview, at the airport, Correa repeated those main points, but with a bitter tone before the crowd: “It has to be said today very clearly, otherwise I will be the first to leave Alianza Pais: I wasn’t born for this²¹⁹”, Correa decried. The former president’s detachment from Moreno’s government wouldn’t slow a bit in the coming weeks, but just the opposite, and on August 21, 2017, he tweeted: “Recall: all that is cynical, treacherous and mediocre will be short-lived”. In August 25, popular *Correistas* Ricardo Patiño, Virgilio Hernández and Paola Pabón resigned from their positions in Moreno’s

²¹⁸ “Por la puerta grande” in the original in Spanish; this is an idiom inherited from bullfighting, very common in the Spanish speaking world. It refers to those *toreros* that after a perfect *corrida* leave the arena through the bullring’s ‘biggest door’ in triumph, literally over the shoulders of some aficionados.

²¹⁹ This video from the Argentinian Public Television captures the seriousness of the moment, and Correa performing as his best as a severe, and angry, charismatic populist leader:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3paNzE3PSs>

government denouncing a campaign to discredit Correa's presidency for being massively stained by corruption²²⁰.

Correa possibly didn't plan this oppositional role at all; his project, very likely, was rather to live in a sort of 'stand-by' retirement in Belgium until returning to Ecuador for the 2021 elections, or to withdraw from Ecuadorean politics definitively, something unlikely due to his charismatic leadership. The former president's steps towards organizing his opposition and his own political survival were thus erratic in the following months. Inside Ecuador, Correa and his allies tried to expel Moreno and his supporters from Alianza Pais and after their failure (Moreno kept the party), they initiated a winding process of forming a new party, named at the beginning 'Partido de la Revolución Ciudadana', –which was declared illegal by the Courts soon after it was created– and later merging with other local political entities. At the same time, especially after the 2018 consultation, a number of court cases hit Correa and his followers. And while the alliance between private media and government-controlled public media attacked or marginalized *Correismo*, the media platform behind Correa and his followers was narrow and weak. One might say that the former president and his allies, who used to control a vast network of public or seized media, started an endless 'crossing the desert' experience, although Correa's international appeal, social media activity and media magnetism possibly saved the day on some occasions. Guillermo Lasso's presidency, starting in 2021, continued this context of low-intensity harassment of *Correismo*, and private and public media collusion with formal and informal powerful constituencies. New 'lines', recalling Patricio Barriga's coded language to

²²⁰See more at <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/08/25/nota/6348343/ricardo-patino-paola-pabon-virgilio-hernandez-abandonan-gobierno/>

communicate to friendly (or to not so amicable) former comrades, were consolidated and many of the former leadership remained in a very difficult position.

Accompanying those situations, the discussion around ‘the return of the past’ dominated many conversations with local journalist, analysts, and other media actors in 2018. However, this restoration was not exactly a sort of regression to the same old days: it was rather a more nuanced situation in which the political ‘Id’, using the Freudian (1962) category, ‘repressed’²²¹ during Correa’s years, furiously reemerged (becoming eventually hegemonic ideas) attacking the so-called ‘*decada ganada*’, and the allegedly well-built narrative of an era that from 2007 onwards had started to solve some of the endemic problems of the country. Curiously, and keeping that very liberally adapted Freudian metaphor, the repressed came back with symptoms identified in the past, but now in a more complex context. The repressed returned repressing what Correa meant for the country, resuming old compulsions pervasive way before Correa, as we saw through views and

²²¹ Let’s recall that for Freud terms such as ‘repression’ or ‘resistance’, embedded of specific political meanings, are purely economic (they represent libido’s dynamics and drives within and without the subject), and don’t presuppose a negative or positive connotation. In *The Ego and the Id*, actually, ‘repression’ seems to be a positive concept, since this kind of filter or blockade of the ‘pleasure principle’ (essential in Oedipus complex, for instance) constitutes the subject, biologically (subject’s ego, based on his body) and historically (subject’s superego, developed by his culture and ideology). ‘Resistance’, on the other hand, involves a more negative situation, since ‘resistances’ in psychoanalysis are directly associated to compulsions and symptoms that impede therapy to remediate a problematic libidinal structure. Obviously translating these concepts from psychoanalysis to political sociology or communication theory is thorny, but they may help to understand under a different light how latent patterns in Ecuador, redirected under Correa (the progressive *caudillo*, by the way, easy to associate with a father figure), remerged dramatically once the people’s leader (the nation being Ecuadoreans’ motherland) was out of power. The result, after a short but stable and structured period of time, was the return of instability and social unrest and anomia with Moreno in power. The most interesting dimension however of this return to old compulsions is the inverted repression established by Moreno and possibly more acutely by Lasso’s presidency. It seems as if for a not negligible part of the Ecuadoreans, Correa’s figure and policies (that structuring ‘father’) is unbearable, possibly because it represents a type of authority and power system alien to the idea of Ecuador and of being Ecuadorean of many in the country, which, I’d venture, goes back for centuries into an unresolved access of the country into its own version of Modernity and has deep feudal/colonial and racist roots.

examinations that spoke of a perpetual lack of real freedom of the press and expression, and media's capture by the local oligarchies. So to speak, the situation was now upside down; the country that Correa tried to 'repress', implanting a distinct superego represented by more egalitarian values, an authoritative state, and progressive economic policies, was now repressing the project that Correa intended to create.

4.1.- Pluralism problems from the field

Accordingly, and confirming Correa's premonitions in the summer of 2017, Ecuador was a different country more than a year after the former charismatic leader passed the baton to Lenin Moreno. Correa's deep reforms, especially those related to media and the economy, were reversed. Correa himself was exiled in Belgium and Fernando Alvarado escaped from Ecuador in October²²², 2018; Ricardo Patiño, one of Alianza Pais' key founders, along with other high-rack officials, fled the country in the first months of 2019. The change also triggered thousands of resignations and layoffs in government agencies and institutions, especially during 2019²²³. The transformation thus was not only solely centered on political elites, but also affected the population at large. Of course, this situation had an intense effect

²²² Fernando Alvarado ran away from Ecuador, allegedly heading to Venezuela, days after being interviewed for this study in September 2018. During our conversation via Skype, Alvarado showed me an electronic tagging device attached to his leg due to his involvement in the 'Gota Azul' case regarding some accounting irregularities in the *Enlaces*' production. He looked anxious and denounced a political persecution from the government. At one moment, the conversation was interrupted by his brother, Vinicio Alvarado, at the phone, who apparently was worried about Fernando's situation. Alvarado didn't interrupt Skype while talking to his brother.

²²³ Mainstream media calculated around 25,000 dismissals in the public sector in 2019 (see at <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2019/12/28/nota/7668180/25-mil-despidos-sector-publico-2019/>), some of them of objectionable legality (<https://gk.city/2019/04/01/despidos-sector-publico-ecuador/>). According to Moreno's administration the goal was to reduce 10% the number of individuals employed by the Ecuadorean state, which was integrated by around 630,000 employees in 2018, according to Instituto Ecuatoriano de la Seguridad Social.

on the country's journalism. Media, public and private, firmly supported Moreno's government positions, and the conflictive media balance created during Correa's long presidency, with its negative and positive effects, was broken. The press was less neutral or critical against the government, and some professional norms were sidelined very often. This state of affairs was also reflected in the views of journalists and policy actors. Contradicting to a large extent what press freedom ratings and international associations were claiming, the Ecuadorean public sphere was not freer than during Correa's years, ruling out, by the way, the argument supported in 2018 by the Colombian Journalism Review and the Committee to Protect Journalists of a welcomed U-turn towards press freedom under Moreno which introduced chapter 4. If previously private and public media were controlled, monitored or repressed by Correa's government, now public media was still under tight control and important political actors and public voices were penalized and silenced if refused to align with the government and mainstream media's politico-ideological goals.

For instance, of the 23 subjects interviewed during the summer of 2018, 10 denied vigorously that the situation of the press and pluralism in the public sphere had improved with the new political situation. In their view, it was the opposite: the country was experiencing the return of old practices of the same oligarchical interests ruling media, reflected in the conscious blockade of the *Correista* political camp or the lavish defense of the government and economic elites' interests. In contrast, 8 informants stated that pluralism got better with Moreno's administration, although many of them had doubts about where the situation was heading to. The rest of the interviewees, five persons, didn't know what to answer or they thought that the situation was the same. While all those claiming a positive

change were employed in private media, the profile of journalists rejecting the improvement was pretty transversal. For example, combative anti-Correista Andersson Boscan, a former reporter at *Expreso* and a popular editor at the digital *La Posta*, recognized serious problems. “No, [pluralism hasn’t improved]. Let me explain: the media are very broad, and the change of command in public and seized media is evident. There you can see a discussion between *Morenistas*, Opposition and *Correistas*. In private media I noticed a deliberated blockade to *Correismo*’s leaders. . . There was a debate among journalists that I respect about whether to go [to cover Correa’s press conferences, etc.], and there were people I respect. . . saying: ‘How are we going to cover this guy who persecuted us for 10 years!’ But one can’t decide who to cover; he is just a political actor, and it has to be covered”. From the other side of the spectrum, Giovanna Tassi, who was ousted from his position as director of state-owned Radio Nacional Publica almost a year after Moreno came to power, interpreted the circumstances as a “return to the past”, to a country in which “very few families” ruled the state and the media. “Now we really are in a state of propaganda”, Tassi explained in her interview, visibly concerned²²⁴ with the drift of the situation. “Before [with Correa] at least there were public [lapses], private media that to make war to Correa they investigated here and there, and they did do their thing. They were too biased, too much wanting to denounce anything about the government, but they did their job. But now? All say the same thing.

²²⁴ The context for the Italian journalist (having worked in Ecuador for the last 30 years) had changed dramatically, and just the place of the interview was illustrative of Tassi’s personal and professional situation; if our first conversation in 2017 took place in a studio at Radio Nacional Publica’s headquarters in Quito, the summer of 2018, Tassi was being interviewed in her house’s kitchen, in a middle class neighborhood (not specially one of the wealthiest) of the capital. At some point of the conversation, she showed a clear anxiety about her professional and labor conditions in the immediate future; “maybe I will have to start delivering pizzas since I don’t see anything for the future”, she decried.

There's not a contrast. . . And public media, which is supposed to guarantee that citizens are informed and offered a variety of opinions. . . I was censored! They told me, Giovanna, these people cannot be interviewed. . . It was the first time this happened to me!"

Among those journalists who declared that the situation got better with the new government, there were expressions of concern regarding that 'return of the past' that Tassi was also jotting down. "[Pluralism] is better", stated firmly *El Universo's* journalist Ricardo Zambrano. "Before we only had a [political] party everywhere; now we have several parties and several voices. On that side, we are better. We cannot deny that. . . But I do feel that we are going back to the country of 1992-1995, where a few parties shared the state powers". Other journalists (all of them working in private media) who thought the situation improved, feared a sort of reversal movement by which the new regime would end up adopting the practices of the former. "I think so [there is more pluralism], but. . . I fear that the curve goes too much to the other side, right? And that they end up, or *we* end up being the same than them. . . That is to say: that the judiciary be controlled by the other side, that the others wouldn't be allowed to speak. . . And I fear that it ends in a sort of historical *vendetta*", elaborated Luis Vivanco, the founder of *La Posta* and part of a family involved in the Ecuadorean press business. This alarm was shared with Juan Carlos Aizprua: "The positive [side from Moreno's administration] is that minimum pluralism, and if in 2021 a right-wing president wins, it will be the same; but it's scary to think what happens if Ecuavisa turns into something like Rafael Correa's seized media".

4.2.- Antipopulist populism and ‘asymmetric’ parallelism and polarization

In contrast with Correa’s populist regime, or that media system with two predominant media sectors and a powerful state, Moreno’s presidency looked like a distorted mirror of his predecessors with a ‘new’ attribute: an Anti-Correa ‘Antipopulist’ strong leaning in which the state colluded with mainstream media setting a particular agenda. This was not, at all, a more democratic media system, but rather a type of ‘Liberal-Captured’ media system in which a populist rhetoric was adopted to attack a political movement barely present in the media. Let’s recall that ‘populising of the media’ phenomenon, highlighted in chapter 3, by which mainstream journalism assimilated some of populism’s core elements (such as the appeal to the people, or the ‘us versus them’ divide defining an enemy) while a populist actor in power (Rafael Correa) experienced a successful ‘political mediatization’ process. Therefore, in a sort of inverted way, populism was still alive in Ecuadorean journalism way after Correa was banned from entering the country²²⁵, but in a truly different form.

As for the other side of that peculiar mutation, Correa and his allies did what they could to defend their positions from the day the schism in the Ecuadorean left was completely materialized, more or less at the end of the summer of 2017, including Moreno’s rapprochement to CONAIE, and a considerable part of the indigenous movement that had contested Correa’s economic policies. First, it would be Correa defending himself and his legacy against Moreno’s attacks and narrative, the Courts cases, and the corruption

²²⁵ As mentioned before, very similar processes have been observed in other Latin American countries, such as Venezuela (Samet, 2019) or Argentina (Kitzberger, 2022) and this pattern of ‘all against the populist’, as a way of denigrating and delegitimizing the political adversary, may have been spreading throughout many political systems in the last decade.

accusations in many television and radio appearances. Additionally, Correa, the most followed leader by far on Twitter in Ecuador, and one of the most followed leaders in Latin America, used his feed to support his views, to attack his enemies or to share ordinary life anecdotes or news. However, the main novelty of this new phase was the new *Enlaces Digitales*, a very modest version of *Enlace Ciudadano*, without almost any production work, directly connecting Correa with his followers via Facebook and YouTube. The first *Enlace Digital* was posted on August 2017 and featured one hour of Correa defending himself and his legacy from corruption accusations with nothing else than his face and voice, showing to the viewers via his own laptop, his austere two bedroom apartment in his new home at Louvain La Neuve, Belgium. Until 2022, Correa has produced 16 of these YouTube shows, materializing his political weakness in a way, by staging a shocking watered-down expression of those fascinating *Sabatinas* that Correa and his team had broadcasted over the years²²⁶.

On the other hand, if those videos performed Correa himself producing media content, the former president featured almost every week for hundreds of interviews, most of them, broadcasted via Skype, Zoom or other communication and web conferencing

²²⁶ Broadly, these videos show Correa talking to the camera explaining his views and using some graphs and pictures, as it was usual in his phase as media president but with a very low production level. The popularity of this medium is limited; these videos, haphazardly re-posted by several unknown users from its original site (first on Correa's Facebook page, later in the former president's YouTube site) gather some thousands of viewers, not many compared to the degree of audiences rallied for other topics. The emerging *Correista* political and media campaign have been using YouTube increasingly, especially after Facebook decided to shut down Correa's page in April 2019. The populist leader denounced this action as a "political decision" to censor his communications, and exposed an agreement between Moreno and Diego Bassante, an Ecuadorean in charge of the Andean region for Mark Zuckerberg's company, to black out his views. Facebook argued that Correa didn't comply the social network security policies by delivering personal data of a private person to the public. This information, by the way, was Moreno's alleged personal bank account number in a Panamanian bank where, according to Correa, the Ecuadorean president saved a fortune without declaring it to the tax authorities.

applications. Many of them were posted on YouTube, some produced by Ecuadorean domestic media, others featuring the former president in major international media, such as the American CNN, French France TV or German DW, but the bulk of Correa's interventions targeted local Ecuadorean media and alternative channels. Correa has provided thousands of minutes to local radios based in Ecuador (an old method dating at least from the 2006 campaign) and to non-mainstream media in a variety of countries, especially Spanish speaking nations. Humble media, such as Radio Alegría in the city of Ambato, Radio Zapotillo, in Loja, Radio Via 1160, in Machala or Radio Impacto 107.9 FM, in El Oro have hosted Rafael Correa's presence several times, and many of them in a friendly and collaborative way. At the same time a number of new digital radios and YouTube shows close to *Correista's* stances or just rejecting the "line" established by Moreno and the 'mainstream media party', emerged in the coming years, with media such as KolectiVOZ (a digital, led by the same Xavier Lasso), Jimmy Jairala's show directed by the long time famous (and also former politician) Ecuadorean radio journalist, or Radio Pichincha Universal, the local radio at Pichincha province controlled by pro-Correa public authorities. Other alternative and community media, including Revista Crisis, Voces, Política con manzanas, Indymedia Ecuador, Desborde, or Apak TV, featured a more neutral reporting regarding Correa. In addition to those actions as a precarious digital media producer and interviewee, Correa transformed himself also in host and occasional journalist for his own television show. Exactly after the 2018 February consultation, the former Economics professor premiered his own interviews program at the Russian state-owned broadcaster RT (former Russia Today) Spanish channel. The show, *Conversando con Correa*, was launched

on March 1, 2018, and the first guest, American philosopher Noam Chomsky, was followed by many voices from different fields and nations, all of them with some kind of relationship to progressive ideas around the world. Until June 2020, Correa produced 53 interviews to public figures such as the American whistleblower Edward Snowden or former president Lula da Silva from Brazil²²⁷.

Notwithstanding Correa's plans to resist Moreno's policies and to rebuild his political platform, mainstream media (private and public) and many powerful organizations (domestic and international) clearly supported the current government, even if social conflict and political turmoil emerged in Ecuador furiously in 2019. The return of harsh neoliberal policies²²⁸, provoked in October 2019 some of the most massive and violent protests in the country at least since 2000 (Ponce, et al., 2020)²²⁹. The *Correista* camp supported those

²²⁷ Many other important and diverse international personalities were invited to the show, including former Iran's president Mahmud Ahmadinejad, Juan Manuel Santos from Colombia, Evo Morales from Bolivia or Pepe Mujica from Uruguay; he had also conversations with other 'alternative' and newsworthy voices, such as Podemos' leader Pablo Iglesias, Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau, Colombia's Piedad Córdoba, English journalist Gleen Greenwald, founder of Italy's Movement Five Star, Beppe Grillo, or former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont; Correa also reserved some room for heterodox economists such as Haa-Joon Chang, John Perkins, Alicia Bárcena or Carlos Ominanmi, and for cultural figures such as Puerto Rican hip-hop singer Residente, soccer star Roberto Carlos, Narcos' series protagonist Wagner Moura or Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, besides famous scientists such as Cuba's genetic researcher Luis Herrera, or Mexican Nobel chemist (and UCSD professor) Mario Molina.

²²⁸ Correa also set out some social and economic reforms in 2016 and 2017, although it cannot be said strictly speaking that the former president was following the usual neoliberal dogmas. The peculiar and conditioned quantitative easing plan deployed by the Ecuadorean Central Bank in 2015 and 2016 (Weisbrot, Johnston and Merling, 2017) may be evidence of that. In any case, those measures would pale before Moreno's orthodox recipes. About Correa's social and economic cutbacks in 2016 more at <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/rafaelcorrea-recortes-herencia-alianzapais-politica.html>

²²⁹ The increase in the price of fuel linked to the government's plan to remove some subsidies ignited several days of unrest and riots, especially in Quito, with the crucial participation of the indigenous movement. Around 11 persons deceased, more than 1,500 were wounded and 1,300 individuals were detained. Moreno even changed the seat of the nation's capital to Guayaquil for some weeks to avert total collapse. Eventually, Moreno came to an agreement with the indigenous movement represented by CONAIE and Pachakutik and the situation calmed down, but the bounds from days of massive demonstrations and, mostly, the stressful months ahead, including the global Covid-19 pandemic, especially virulent in Ecuador, plunged the nation into a state of full crisis.

protests from day one, primarily sparked and fed by the indigenous movement, calling on early elections and promoting demonstrations in Quito and other parts of the country using different formats. Public local radio in Quito province, Radio Pichincha Universal, controlled by a *Correista* administration was shut down for 20 days, and several *Correista* figures ended up arrested with charges of sedition, or sought refuge in the Mexican embassy at Quito. RT television network (owned by the Russian government) and Telesur (owned primarily by the Venezuelan government) providing a very critical, pro-Correa, coverage against the government, saw their activities suspended on cable television by a presidential decree. Meanwhile, mainstream media was adamant in their support of Moreno's government during the process, contributing to the narrative that the protests were part of a plot designed by Correa to overthrow Moreno.

In any case, Moreno's government survived the crisis and went full ahead. The Communication Law was finally reformed between December 2018 and February 2019, amending, or eliminating key articles from the 2013 version. The definition of communication changed (now a 'human right' instead of a 'public service'), the mandatory deontological codes disappeared, and the ideal division of the national media spectrum muted into a new design that gives 56% of the scope to commercial media, 34% to community media and only 10% to public media; controversial articles and institutions such as 'media lynching' and the Supercom were eliminated, along with any mention about regulating media ownership; the concept of previous censorship was restrained together with the right of reply and rectification, and many other provisions were ruled out. In general, the reform completely transformed the Law, reminding very little of the piece of legislation

delivered by Correa's regime²³⁰. However, a very important debate for the upcoming years should be around how enduring some of those changes were, and how this transformed the Ecuadorean media system. Kitzberger and Schuliaquer (2021) have discussed those changes compared to similar de-regulatory processes in Argentina, and found that the Ecuadorean law was the most amended; they also indicate that possibly the most resilient parts of legislation were provisions regarding community media and interests linked to the indigenous movement.

At the same time, however, popular confidence in the national institutions (an important clue to predict representation crises, as we saw in chapter 1) has been dramatically deteriorating since 2018. The numbers have plummeted to percentages close to the massive distrust displayed in the years 2000 to 2005, so in some way, that return of the past may be also fully confirmed by the lack of confidence in national institutions, including media. After a disastrous managing of the Covid 19 pandemic by Moreno's administration (Ecuador's death rates in 2020 were the highest in the region along with Peru), and the consistent political opposition delivered by *Correismo* and the indigenous movement in the 2019 events, conservative Guillermo Lasso's election as president in 2021 surprised many observers, especially since Lasso had been Moreno's solid political ally. But when Correa's

²³⁰ Calls to further change this reform have been made by current conservative President Guillermo Lasso, aiming to suspend *de facto* if not *de iure* any regulation, since the 2008 Constitution obliges the state to legislate about communication and media. However, the lack of a consistent majority of representatives supporting Lasso for his first term (2021-2024), makes these final changes difficult to envision.

candidate, young heterodox economist Andrés Arauz, faced Lasso²³¹ in the run-off, *Correismo* was unable to gather enough support from other progressive political parties, especially the traditional Izquierda Democrática and the indigenist Pachakutik.

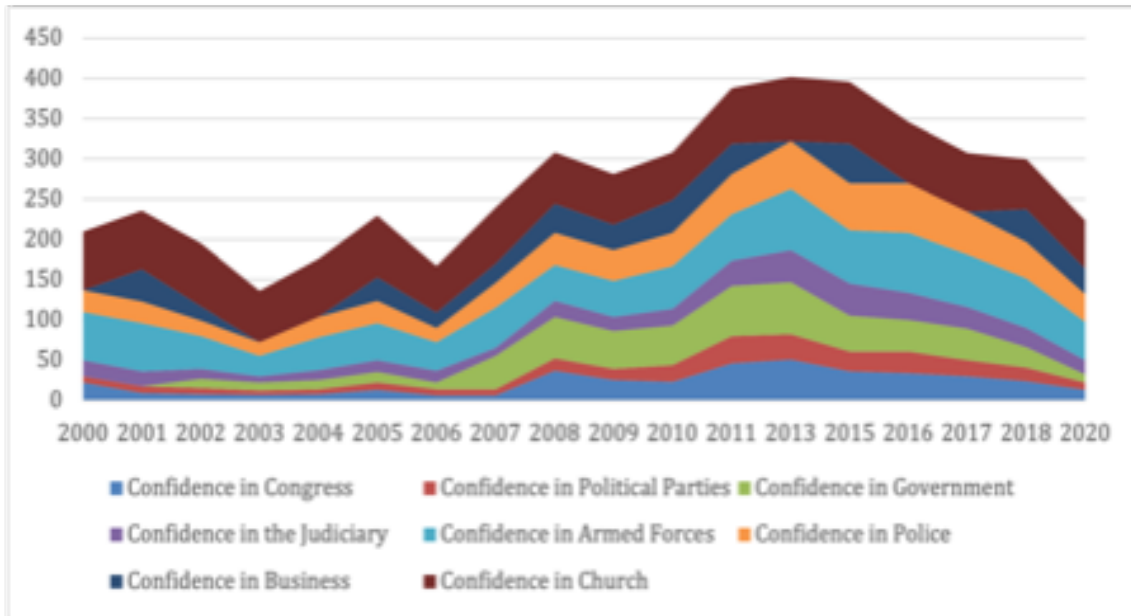


Figure 6.7: Confidence in institutions (Source: Latinobarometro)

²³¹ Instead of Yaku Pérez, Pachakutik’s candidate, another political leader aggressively opposed to Rafael Correa’s political figure and legacy. He was charged with sabotage and terrorism for blockading roads during demonstrations against against the Quimsacocha mining project in 2011.

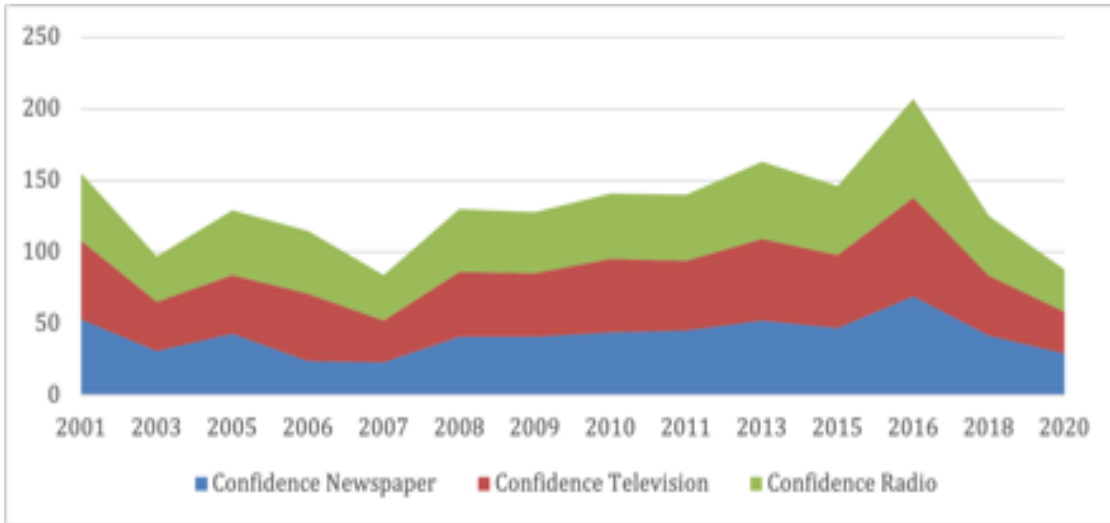


Figure 6.8: Confidence in media (Source: Latinobarometro)

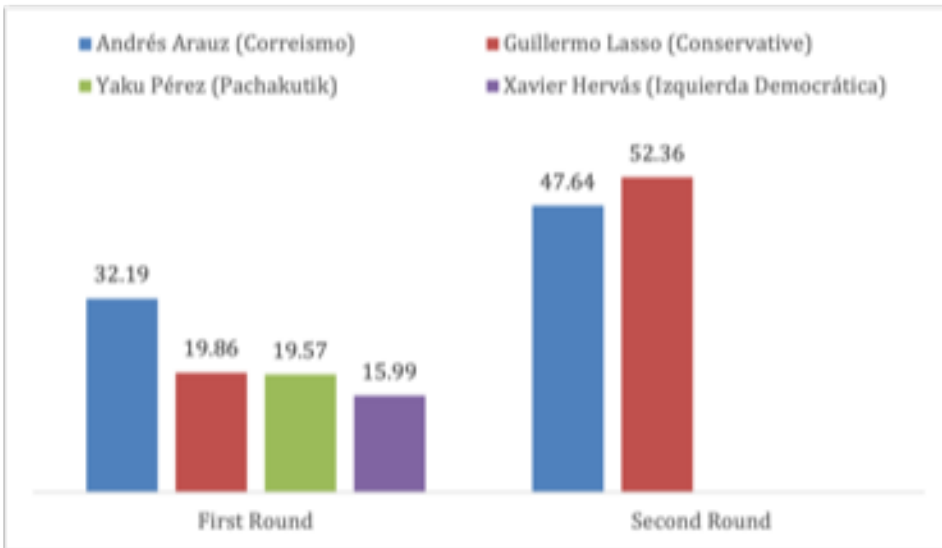


Figure 6.9: 2021 Election's results (Source: Consejo Nacional Electoral)

The media system's transformation since Moreno came to power, under the light of the content analysis results (along with the more qualitative data), may be a central question to understand why *Correismo* didn't return to power given Moreno's calamitous presidency. And although a straightforward thesis of the direct effect of Moreno's media policies and

his collusion with mainstream media on the Ecuadorean voters could be contested²³², the influence on the population of a media environment where an important part of the political sphere was overshadowed or vilified as the enemy should be discussed. As we saw in this chapter, mainstream media (private and public) and a considerable part of alternative and community media positioned clearly against Correa, his political figure, his legacy and eventually his candidate. So, in summary, even if *Correismo* happened to be solidly represented in the national assembly as the first political party by the number of representatives after the 2021 election, the lack of plurality, diversity and openness in the media persisted. Additionally, current President Lasso, many other political groups and mainstream media have persevered in their attacks on Correa. The very low coverage of President Lasso's connections to the so-called Pandora Papers, which exposed Lasso's tax evasion through a number of shell companies, has been a concerning symptom of a trend that appears to be consolidated.

In some way, given the current state of affairs in the Ecuadorean media system, it seems as if the complex conflictive symbiosis between populism and journalism has been transmuted into a viral relationship in which some of populism's features infected the media, while the former powerful populist actor was no longer able to fully mediatize its political agenda. In other words, what worked as a conflictive although symbiotic relationship, has derived into something way different: a living system incapable to self-regulate, unable to

²³² About media effects today, and assumptions of this theory, see more at Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016). This field, so central in political communication studies, tend to see the media system level, which is being discussed in this work, as a macro approach considered, most of the times, *caeteris paribus* in the different research. There are exceptions, however, which confirm a direct effect of distinct media systems on citizens attitudes and political behavior (Aalberg, & Curran, 2012; Aalberg, Van Aelst & Curran, 2010).

compromise and, in consequence, doomed to be politically and economically unstable in the coming years, possibly until a new transversal project emerges reenacting the productive clash that defined the ‘Correista Exception’, hopefully improving their most damaging aspects and keeping a critical view on their most positive facets. In any case, this will be the topic of a different, although totally connected, study on the fascinating case of Ecuador’s ‘media-politics’.

Conclusion

“The revolution will be televised”: Media, populism and the role of the state today

The revolution will not be televised
The revolution will not be brought to you
By Xerox in four parts without commercial interruptions
(Gil Scott-Heron, 1971)

CNN anchor Marcelo Longobardi posed the question with traits of amazement on his face: “I want to ask you about this obsession you have shown, you as president, Cristina Fernández in Argentina as president, or today President Trump [displaying this obsession] against CNN and other media. All of you are arguing that all that is happening to our countries is responsibility of the media and not of political leaders. I could never understand it”. Responding via Zoom or Skype from Brussels that December 2019, Rafael Correa, exhibited the usual background from his exile in Belgium, a studio with some books and family pictures. “I understand that you don’t understand because it is your profession. But I reject the part about that obsession; it is the opposite; it is the obsession that you have with honest politicians. . . . Instead of this image of the evil politician persecuting honest and courageous journalists fighting for common good, another image of very questionable journalists, guardians of the status quo, who abusing from their power persecute honest politicians, is much closer to reality. Look, the press is a power, and you cannot deny this, and in democracy all power must have a counter-power. What is the press’ counter-power?

Our democracy has lost its essence, which was the people's will; now what we have it's the media's will, this mediatized democracy cannot be called democracy. So, what does society respond to that? Regulation and the law". Longobardi, with a sort of skeptical expression, patiently let Correa elaborate his criticism against commercial media, including CNN, "owned by international capital". Once Correa finished his speech, the CNN anchor, who also worked for Clarin media conglomerate in Argentina, reminded his tough personal situation during Cristina Fernandez's era; "I was persecuted and not only once, but many times, and even with violence". Correa responded not quite troubled; maybe now he was the one displaying some skepticism. "Ok, I regret that, but people have the right to respond, don't they? What it is not fair is that if the media say something it is free speech but if I respond to the media, I'm attacking free speech; enough is enough. . . With this logic, just criticizing the president would be attacking democracy; it is absurd."

These last five minutes of one of the several interviews Correa granted to international media after leaving power introduce many of the different layers and angles of the relations between journalism and populism explored in this study. Correa presents a checks-and-balances problem to the point of denouncing that "questionable journalists" have been persecuting honest politicians, and that unaccountable media undermine democracy. The journalist, however, doesn't seem to believe that and responds that he, personally, has been persecuted many times during Argentina's populist presidency. This is the basic frame of media wars where some politicians, many of them populists, challenge mainstream media, and media institutions, most of the times private and commercial, respond by denouncing attacks on press freedom and depicting these politicians as authoritarian leaders obsessed by

power and media control. This research was born to examine that conflictive relationship, the roots, and consequences of that fight around media power, and in these pages, addressing the empirical and theoretical conclusions of this study, it might seem at first that the problematic looping between the media and populism remained unchanged in Ecuador... But it didn't. In the Ecuadorean case we also saw that local journalists and other media actors displayed impressions about media very different from the expected libertarian discourses that have been dominating discussions about journalism and news media in the last decades. Furthermore, those same subjects claimed that journalism got better during Correa's presidency and their views were consistently supported by a content analysis of the two most important newspapers in the country. In sum, this research not only dealt with a conflictive relationship: it ran into a media transformation, or a sort of surprising media revolution with positive outcomes, although contested almost by everybody in the country. Let's recall that even people very close to Correa saw problematic provisions in the Communication Law and that Moreno's pro-dialogue policy was very well received at first. Actually, in that fragment from his interview with CNN, Correa himself mentions timidly the solution to that conundrum ("regulation and the law") possibly aware of well spread criticism upon his more interventionist media policies. But qualitative and quantitative data converge in one fascinating argument: there was a deep transformation during Correa, and even if several doubtful and authoritarian aspects were perceived, Ecuador's public sphere seemed more plural and diverse than ever with Correa in power. This is, I believe, possibly the most important finding in this research: there was a complicated media revolution in Ecuador that challenges many solidly established claims and discourses about the relationship between

the press and the state. So to speak, playing with the title and lyrics of Gil Scott-Heron famous song cited above, and contesting the philosophy behind Scott-Heron's poem, in Ecuador *the revolution was televised*.

This reality challenges most of the mainstream scholarship dealing with populism and press freedom (Conaghan, 2016; Kellam & Stein, 2016; Kenny, 2020; Mélenlez & Moncagatta, 2019; Waisbord, 2018), and more specifically, it amplifies the scarcer research focused on the relations between populism and journalism (Esser, Stepinska & Hopmann, 2017; Mazzoleni, 2014; Wettstein et al, 2018). As we saw in chapter 4, 5 and 6, all the conflictive, performative, and institutional processes converging in Ecuador in the last 15 years didn't challenge press freedom in its full meaning, nor did it suppress critical media, nor did it deteriorate journalistic professionalism, but rather the opposite. Furthermore, this evidence, emerged from the Ecuadorean context but possibly connected to contemporary patterns of the relations between media and politics, suggests trends of more global and macro processes such as mediatization and populism that remain not fully explored. To start, the Ecuadorean case rules out assumptions of an allegedly neutral media logic ruling politics (or other social fields) following an almost evolutionary natural path since the 1960s, and directly defies the analytical composition of that logic²³³ (Esser and Strömback, 2014; Strömback, 2008) which brings together dimensions that may contradict each other, such as professionalism and commercialization. Let's recall that professionalism was reinforced

²³³ Esser and Strömback propose that the media logic is comprised of three dimensions combining professionalism, commercialism and media technology (2014, p.17), and although they note possible tensions between these ambits and acknowledge the existence of different media systems, they seem not to fully consider their political implications, as if professionalism and commercialism (let alone media technology) could be analytically detached from their historical and political context, and of their implicit or explicit political goals.

during Correa's presidency right when the state was enforcing regulations to media institutions, and media in Ecuador, often independent from political actors (although also a player in opaque agreements with governments before Correa) had clear economic and political goals other than expanding their reach, ratings, or 'neutral' influence. Simply put, the mediatization of politics theory as introduced by several authors looks thus quite simplistic or inflexible, and unable to fully explain cases such Ecuador, and very likely many other instances in Latin America and other different contexts, possibly including Western Europe and the United States today.

As for populism, this study has provided a much more complex and nuanced representation of how populism emerges, endures and develops in a changing media system. Populism, contrary also to mainstream scholarship (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; De la Torre, 2010; Grzymala-Busse et al, 2020; Müller, 2016; Panievsky, 2021; Rogenhofer and Panievsky, 2020; Rovira Katlwasser & Mudde, 2012) is not merely evil, an excess or a danger to journalism and liberal democracy, but a major adjustment when national institutions don't seem to represent the society (Laclau, 2005). Populism thus in our world today may be the word for radical expansive politics in liberal democracies and this is, as the Ecuadorean case shows, intimately associated with media, especially in media centric societies such as Ecuador, when all institutions fail, and social movements and social organizations don't appear to be ready or capable to respond to the crisis. Emerged from a quasi-nihilistic situation in 2005 and 2006, Correa's populism was communicational and media-centric from the start, as I demonstrated in chapter 1, displaying transversal and progressive values and antagonizing the people against the political class and traditional

oligarchies in perfect syntony with what alternative and mainstream media were broadcasting back then. Communication and media were so essential for Correa's populist platform and political goals that, as we saw in chapter 2, the populist president started to intervene progressively in the media system without any pre-designed anticipation, but with the certitude that media played a crucial role in his presidency and political plans. In chapter 3, we analyzed how Correa challenged the inherited media environment to support his political project not by denying journalism's principles and better practices, but rather the opposite: Correa turned himself into a key media actor and imitated professional journalism; also, his media policies tried to push journalistic professionalism and media democratization, not just aiming to colonize existing media institutions. On the other hand, mainstream media appeared to embrace populist ideas and techniques to gain audience and influence over the political life in Ecuador, completing a sort of 'conflictive symbiosis' in which two rationales appeared to function 'mediatizing' populism and 'populising' the media.

This conclusion chapter plans to discuss further these complex interactions and relations focusing especially on what I believe are the two major outcomes after studying the Ecuadoran case. First, this research claims that today, in the Ecuadorean case and possibly in many other instances, it seems deceiving to separate populism from media, or even politics from media and vice versa. In chapter 2, it was stated that we need to think the relationship between media and populism as a sort of conflictive symbiosis, where semi-autonomous entities grow together. This analytical and empirical confirmation, of course, is not an endorsement of the situation (suggesting that journalism and politics *must* merge) but the claim that professional, autonomous, public service oriented media are struggling to have

influence as such in the public sphere. Secondly, this context demands a media transformation which raises concerns after decades of libertarian discourses dominating our understanding of journalism and media in general. Possibly, considering a ‘media revolution’, as the ‘televised’ experience in Ecuador has shown, will spark tensions and heated debates, but this discussion is extremely urgent, and it will require rethinking the role of a democratic state on setting the legislation and institutions needed to restore or to recreate the relationship between democracy and the media, and finally to facilitate an independent press. The further exploration of these two arguments, central to understand the full theoretical scope of this study, are thus the main focus of these last pages, accompanied also with a non-disguised intention of proposing some broad global debates to start thinking solutions for a world in which polarization, misinformation or blatant partisan propaganda have become the daily bread in so many societies, from Ecuador and Latin American to other latitudes, overcoming cultural, economic and social borders.

1.- The convergence between populism and media: from the ‘independent press’ to ‘conflictive symbiosis’

As we have seen in this study, Ecuador was a media centric society in the early 2000s that developed a peculiar relationship with populism. Even if media in the Andean country were still not very professionalized, or media markets were not transparent and well developed, in 2005 and 2006 Ecuador was a highly mediatized country and consequently the political actor that won the presidential election was notoriously the one that better adopted the messages and formats provided by the media. Furthermore, the deep institutional crisis

that preceded Correa's populist leadership possibly created the perfect context for an even more media centric society. This reading of the situation seems to support the basic contemporary definition of mediatization of politics and its harmonic relationship with populism, as defined by Giampietro Mazzoleni (2008, 2014), possibly one of the key authors discussing this topic. Although Mazzoleni appears not to contemplate that his finding could establish a different approach towards media and politics and doesn't go further into this type of analysis, his depiction of populism as a product of mediatization could be a consistent solution to understand Ecuador in the mid 2000s.

However, as Correa started his presidency and tried to carry out his political projects, the populist president clashed with media, disrupting any idea of his leadership as a subordinate agent or as a melodious companion of the intense mediatization of politics experienced in the country. Rather, Correa happened to challenge mainstream media with its own weapons and new legislation. I called this process first 'political mediatization', contradicting an apparently neutral and all-embracing media logic, but a better understanding of what happened in Ecuador before, during and after Correa may be summarized in a specific approach upon the relationship between populism and journalism (or just media and politics). The sequence of a Liberal-Captured media system – characterized by particular interests 'capturing' journalism's professional goals– succeeded by a Polarized Pluralist Populist system with Correa, and changed by an Antipopulist-Captured system once Correa was out of power, disclosed a fascinating populism-media model, very explicit in the last two media landscapes during and after Correa's presidency, but also clear in the full media populism moment occurred during the previous system. In

short, it is clear that populism and media in all these junctures worked hand in hand: they couldn't be analytically detached as distinct logics and rather they formed a sort of combined operational system.

In other words, a kind of 'conflictive symbiosis' between populism and media emerged, as we saw in chapters 2 and 3. However, this 'symbiosis' didn't work in the same way in all those different phases mentioned above. With Correa in power, especially after the passage of the Communication Law, journalistic professionalism –and values such as autonomy, pluralism, openness and professional practices– improved and media-politics realigned in a distinct manner. Despite this, once Moreno came to power, the fusion between the press and political actors happened to be more intense, similarly to what it was before Correa, although now with the almost universal rejection of one political actor: Correa and his allies. These different stages however don't efface a situation in which each field, journalism and populism, 'learnt' from each other. A full media populism in Ecuador in 2005-2006 was determinant for Rafael Correa's victory, and a bold mediatized populist presidency was indispensable to shape Ecuadorean journalism; finally, a shift in the government with Moreno in power created a paradoxical Antipopulist-Captured system. All this time the news media performed as an essential political actor, with deep changes that would be discussed further, but basically remained political and driven by a political logic. On the other hand, political actors, only apparently conditioned by electoral support, performed as media actors, adopting journalistic principles and practices (including sensationalist techniques) to convey their message and support their agenda; obviously Rafael Correa was the most media savvy and successful actor in the political system.

Following Esser and Strömback's (2014) distinction between media and political logics, aspects of "commercialism, professionalism and media technology" (Esser & Strömback, 2014: 17-19) in the media were colonized by populism, and dimensions such as "policies, politics and polity" (Esser & Strömback, 2014: 15-16) were invaded by the media acting as political or even populist actors.

It is extremely difficult, hence, to observe (and to understand) Ecuador during these years as a case in which the independent press, working as such, was threaten by a populist regime which also damaged press freedom and free speech. As we saw in chapters 4, 5 and 6, the so-called 'independent press' in Ecuador before Correa never was very professional or a plural representation of the society, but rather a reflection of opaque links between economic and political elites with low professional standards. In some way, the press before Correa was implicitly or latently political, and its 'neutral' façade didn't represent the nation's complexity nor provide a balanced discussion of the most important issues. Once Correa came to power this system collapsed and led to a polarized system in which political goals and allegiances became more explicit. Failing to contemplate this complex panorama, most of the scholarship studying the relationship between populism and press freedom in Ecuador was widely wrong. Accordingly, the problem was not a leftist authoritarian leader that almost naturally (without too much explanation and comprehension) put press freedom in danger, as it was seen by many scholars, but the minimal knowledge that these approaches shown of what press freedom had meant in countries such as Ecuador and the inability of thinking the media as a social institution intimately connected to specific historical conditions and powerful interests, private or public, including of course political actors and

institutions. It is representative of the serious problems of such approaches, and sadly ironic, that a moment in which Ecuador's journalism was flourishing was named as an 'era of repression', while the years in which Ecuadorean media had basically allied with the government and closed the door to many voices in the nation, were seen as a 'return to press freedom'.

1.1.- The birth of the independent press and 'mediatization'

In addition to confirming all these inconsistencies, an important lesson to be drawn from this 'media-populist symbiosis' that materialized in Ecuador should be that the idea, as laudable as it is, of an independent press allergic to political agendas and fiercely autonomous from power, needs to be put in conditional terms. Broadly speaking, the idea of an 'objective' independent press, professionalized and shielded from partisan goals or particular interests, is quite recent. The history of the press, in geographical areas more studied such as Western Europe and the United States, is comprised by several phases since the first newspapers appeared in the Eighteenth century, and only very recently, in historical terms, the news media became associated with this notion of the independent press clearly differentiated of partisan and particular interests. More specifically, as it was advanced in chapter 4, the birth of the independent press, adopting concepts such as partisan neutrality, or professional reporting and public service orientation, may be observed at least since the 1950s in the United States and Western Europe, but not before (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003; Lebovic, 2016; Pickard, 2014, 2020). It was after World War II –and the extremely polarized 1930s–, that the conception of the press focused on public interest service, and

adopting a watchdog function consolidated. Events such as the Pentagon Papers or Watergate in the United States, and the growing reputation of public broadcasting in many European countries, confirm this idea of a central, balanced, civic understanding of media that was absent or not totally hegemonic before those decades. Things started to change for media in the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s, but that rooted concept of the independent press became widely dominant; even if in many national contexts the role of the press was not exactly meant to be that of a-ideological objective canvas for news (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), the idea of a plural and autonomous press, reflecting the public interest and truth gained a strong traction.

However, the conditions that made that press possible, compared, for instance, to what happened before World War II, were oddly forgotten and the idea of a press detached from politics happened to be almost naturalized. Some authors have explained how the media was shaped during and in the aftermath of the war (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003; Pickard, 2014), but the idea of an independent press usually is taken for granted, maybe because factors that made the press more independent, less polarized or more ‘socially responsible’²³⁴, have become almost aberrant since the neoliberal consensus, which started in the 1980s, came to be hegemonic. In other words, there is evidence to support the thesis that the media became differentiated from partisan lines and a space for truth and shared discussion, once democratic states intervened and regulated media in the Post-War World. Without being aware of that reality, we cannot understand that *this* press was the result of a

²³⁴ The introduction of this concept in the very libertarian United States by the Hutchins Commission in 1947 defines, I believe, the whole context of a moment that today seems oddly forgotten. In chapter 4 I addressed the similarities between the experience of polarization, partisanship and aggressive stances against the Roosevelt administration in the 30s and Rafael Correa’s clashes with the media and his policies decades after.

balance of power and a set of agreements between social, economic and political actors that determined that the media needed to be controlled by democratic institutions, even in the very libertarian United States. Or put it in another way, after the traumatic experience of fascism in the 1930s and the war, it became extremely clear that media were so important and political that they needed to be regulated.

Curiously, right when those conditions were making possible this idea of the media as a neutral or shared space for discussion, new discourses started to circulate taking this notion way further. In 1964 Marshall McLuhan popularized a new understanding of mass media in which communications technology and media formats became central. Yet, with the famous catchy phrase “the medium is the message” McLuhan was not merely acknowledging media technology as the main factor shaping content, but also helping to put media and only media (without political, economic or cultural ties) in a dominating and almost fetish position in contemporary societies that it still holds today. The mediatization of politics theory (Hjarvard, 2015; Strömback, 2008) seems to agree with this vision, dating the start of the increasing importance of media in the 1960s and 1970s. It is not probably a coincidence that Snow and Altheide’s classic ‘Media Logic’ was published in 1979 aiming basically to confirm the thesis according to which a logic made by media’s formats and grammars was becoming dominant in the United States.

It was within this context of rising media technologies and discourses about media logics that the neoliberal turn started to emerge in the late 1970s and began to dominate in the 1980s under Reagan and Thatcher’s aggressive neoconservative governments. With its central focus on market solutions, neoliberalism proposed successfully to increase

competition in media markets, proceed to privatize or defund public media, or facilitated the creation of more media technologies. Media were progressively deregulated and liberalized, and commercialism or plain economic profit became their basic logic, even for public broadcasters. As Mark S. Fowler, the Republican chairman of the Federal Commission of Communication in 1987, famously put it, television happened to be nothing more than “a toaster with pictures”²³⁵ or just another “commodity”. This philosophy was widely applied in many media system with several degrees of intensity. For instance, Nordic and central European countries, very centered around robust and well funding public media, kept many regulations from the past although competition and liberalization was encouraged, while Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, adopted a more savage deregulation. In the United States, however, where the neoliberal agenda was more utterly implemented, cable television was triggered very quickly, and the system was turned into an extremely commercial venue without any public funded counterpart or state regulation²³⁶. The libertarian American media system was restructured further with the 1996 Telecommunications Act under Bill Clinton’s administration, which by facilitating big

²³⁵ The news published in 1987 of the Reaganite F.C.C. repealing the last regulations inherited from the Roosevelt-Truman administrations appeared in the *The New York Times* in one of the last pages of the newspaper right over the weather report. It was entitled “Under Fowler, F.C.C. treated television as commerce”. It is ironical that such a relevant topic that would impact *The New York Times* very core business and philosophy happened to have that low profile coverage.

²³⁶ The expansion of the Internet, originated as a communications project for the military in the United States, followed this logic very quickly in the 2000s, taking this commercial rationale to the new heights of what several authors have called ‘surveillance capitalism’ (Lyon, 2019) masterfully refining and intensifying neoliberalism’s core features. It is interesting to notice how cable television in the United States and Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Internet, expanded globally in the 2000s, shared a similar sequence passing from an almost utopian phase of increasing pluralism and diversity to a later state in which a sort of commercial alienation took over earlier expectations. About pluralism and diversity in cable television in the 1980s see Zook’s (1999) fascinating study on Fox; about the first utopian analyses of the Internet, see Castells (2009); critical approaches about the commercialized Internet are very well represented in McChesney (2013).

corporations' expansion triggered oligopolistic tendencies and reduced media's diversity and pluralism.

Obviously, this neoliberal media dimension was part of a much larger project in which anti-labor laws, financial deregulation and trade globalization transformed economies and societies, and even though a discussion about neoliberalism's genealogy or historicity goes way beyond the scope of this study, it has to be noticed that media played a fundamental role in spreading the new neoliberal common sense in the West and abroad (Shahin, 2022) adopting, besides the main features of this 'master ideology' (Gerbaudo, 2021), an understanding of politics that shaped also the way the independent press was refocused in the 1980s and 1990s. This shift consisted in framing politics as a purely administrative business, changing the common sense established after World War II by which politics was considered the field of agreement between contradictory forces, or the pact between labor and capital²³⁷ represented by unions and the left, and business organizations and the right. In the 1980s, and in 1990s after the collapse of Soviet Union, a strong consensus about how the economy had to be run displaced politics and refocused the role of unions, business organizations and political parties; capitalism's core antagonism between capital and labor was forgotten, and a sort of entrepreneurial mindset, or governmentality, as Foucault (1979) finely put it, took over businesses, social organizations, public administrations and newsrooms. As the 'natural' response to any problem was to find solutions in the market or

²³⁷ Which in the United States was complicated by the race question (or the internal colonization question) that has intersected labor and capital relations in the country since the inception of the Republic. In Europe the race question was directly associated to external colonization processes with deep impact in the metropolis in the 1950s and 1960s. About these intersections in the United States, see more at Omi M. and Winant H. (1986) *Racial formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge.

the private initiative, the government, solemnly framed as “the problem” by Reagan himself in his inauguration speech in 1981, was increasingly framed as the main obstacle for the natural liberation of the economic forces or, as it was consistently highlighted in chapter 4, for the development of press freedom and journalism.

At the peak of this neoliberal consensus, in the mid 1990s, with a very limited political sphere and the first wave of new communication technologies, first theories of a ‘mediatization of politics’ started to appear. Possibly one of the most consistent was crystallized in Bernard Manin’s ‘audience democracy’ concept (Manin, 1997: 193-218), a historically rooted understanding of politics, that put the media and media experts at the center of the discussion of the “metamorphoses of representative government”. According to Manin, we cannot longer consider voters as represented by classical political institutions, such as political parties reflecting clearly existing cleavages, but rather, we need to think voters as a non-homogeneous ‘audience’ that respond to politicians’ initiatives critically determined by media experts. This picture works very well, above all, to understand partially the first Correa, performing as a candidate; but Manin considers media as a neutral platform. In conclusion, this rising discourse of media as a powerful apolitical force restructuring politics, finally crystalizing in theories of a mediatization of politics years after, coincided with the emergence and development of the neoliberal consensus and the idea of a press independent thanks to their commercial viability in 1980s and 1990s.

In sum, the idea of the independent press, naturalized as a neutral and professional space separated from politics, was the result of two different although connected moments: one between 1945 and 1980, in which the press was carefully reconstructed as the product

of a social-democratic consensus, and second one, since 1980, in which the press was reconfigured as a professional business with an essential economic logic that would keep it away from any partisan slant. However, the neoliberal consensus started to deteriorate especially in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 Great Recession, which eroded the economic bases of that consensus. Before that structural transformation, several confrontations against free trade, migratory flows and income inequality were present in many national and regional contexts (such as Latin America), but they skyrocketed globally after the economic crisis, with global demonstrations taking place in 2011 in many cities around the world. It would certainly be in 2016²³⁸ when the first populist manifestations began to reach strongly the Global North, affecting the relationship between the press, now transformed with new formats and business logics, and politics, now shaken by the emergence of pervasive populist leaderships.

It is not accidentally that this major neoliberal decline, still not fully understood in academia, possibly because of the difficulty of analyzing live processes and the complex impact of the neoliberal consensus in the university²³⁹, coincided with the rise of populism

²³⁸ Let's recall that it was in 2015 and 2016 that Bernie Sanders, from the left, and Donald Trump, from the right tried to take over the Democratic and Republican platforms; Trump succeeded and finally won the presidency. In Europe, political movements and events such as the emergence of Syriza in Greece, Podemos, in Spain, Jeremy Corbin in the UK, the Brexit's referendum or the rise of Cinque Stelle in Italy, marked the political life of those years.

²³⁹ Possibly the problem in mainstream academia is that the neoliberal consensus in the university created deeper and more epistemological transformations than in other fields. Let's recall that the expansion of 'soft' middle range theories, the rejection of 'strong' totalizing theories such as Marxism or Classical theory in Economics, or the spread of poststructuralism overlapped and accompanied neoliberalism. Those changes created interests, a different political economy (such as the structural encouragement of publishing as much academic articles as possible, usually using quantitative methods, to obtain job positions and power within the institutions, diminishing the influence of dense, historical and contextual studies) and paths that deeply impacted humanities and social sciences. Some of the problems to observe what really happened in Ecuador around Rafael Correa's presidency may have had their origin in this specific 'governmentality' in the American and European academia.

in its two major versions, right and left, conservative and progressive, and the return of polarized politics to the public sphere as “a postmodern version of the 1930s” as Greece’s former Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, famously expressed. Populism, indeed, played a central role of accompanying the crisis of the neoliberal consensus and the shift of the role of media as increasingly evident political actors. More specifically, I believe that populism happened to be the logical companion of a failing neoliberalism: contrary to the previous consensus, populist leaders in the right or the left made explicit the politicization of many social fields, vetoed by the neoliberal consensus, and proclaimed that the government’s role needed to change accordingly. About this clash between neoliberal repressed politics and populism’s uninhibited notion of the political, Laclau (2005: 73-83) has made the most accurate description of the populist logic as a combinatory expansive rationale (“an *equivalential logic*”, as Laclau defines it, in contrast with the functional “*difference logic*” during consensual periods) ready to rise when the institutional setting is not able to respond to urging heterogeneous popular demands. This is exactly what happened in Ecuador since 1999 with the highest peak reached during the 2005-2006 populist biennium and the emergence of Rafael Correa (RC) as the ‘empty signifier’ (following Laclau’s conceptual apparatus) finally representing all those unanswered demands from the people through his own persona and the *Revolución Ciudadana* (RC) project, confronting the political class and traditional oligarchies in any aspect of social, economic or political life in Ecuador. The current global economic malaise, cultural backlashes against globalization, and the Covid-19 global pandemic since 2020 have done nothing but to intensify these major changes turning the neoliberal consensus into a sort of cultural and political zombie, given the fast

and overwhelmingly state intervention and the further politicization of more fields such as science and public health. It goes without saying that treating the relationship between media and politics and the question of the independent press today without being aware of this past and the current major transformations can only lead to mistaken analyses of our contemporary societies and the role of media and communications today, as the major contradictions produced between this study's results and claims set up by mainstream scholarship perfectly show.

1.2.- The Latin American pioneer

Those discussions about the origins and conditions of the independent press, the analytical separation between media and politics, or the eruption of populism into politics were experienced in Latin America well before they entered the public sphere in the Global North. Paraphrasing Breman (2013), with Ecuador and Latin America it was the West that followed the Rest and not vice versa. This aspect of course makes the Ecuadorean case especially relevant, and it is striking to contemplate how events that took place in Quito, Santiago de Chile or Buenos Aires preceded similar phenomena in very different contexts. For instance, echoes of *Revolta de los Forajidos*, the headless citizen turmoil that crashed the Ecuadorean political system in 2005, could easily be heard in popular demonstrations at central squares in the Mediterranean arc (including Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Portugal or Greece) in 2011, in the social agitation of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States that year, or in the 2014 Hong Kong or Ukraine protests. Additionally, the emergence of populist leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Cristina Fernández or Rafael Correa clashing with

mainstream media in the mid 2000s anticipated the Cinque Stelle Movement in Italy in 2012, Podemos's disruption in Spanish politics in 2014, Syriza's complex government experience in Greece in 2015, or Donald Trump's election as president of the United States in 2016. Additionally, the thin although institutionalized wall separating politics from media, or partisanship from professional journalism, was knocked down in Ecuador and Latin America well before examples of blatant partisan media and misinformation became usual in the Global North's public sphere. Politics was about media, as media was about politics in Latin America sooner, for example, than Trump's or Fox News' determinant roles in American politics.

Why these apparent pioneering experiences have occurred in Latin America goes far beyond the topic of this study, but they certainly confirm relevant trends, especially regarding the origin and impact of neoliberalism in regional media and society at large. To start, let's recall that the first country that experimented with neoliberal economic policies, imposed by fire and blood, was Chile under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship since 1973, much earlier than Thatcher (1979) and Reagan (1981). Responding to the oil crisis and rampant inflation of the mid-1970s, and gathering implicit and explicit support from the United States and powerful institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, neoliberalism hence was received as a sort of political and economic backlash in a region that had recently embraced popular politics with the creation of the first mass parties and mass organizations after World War II (De la Torre, 2015; Munck, 2002), and had adopted the so-called *desarrollismo* increasing the role of the state with import substitution policies since the 1950s (Acosta, 2002). The situation in Latin America was also very tense

in geopolitical terms; after the events in Guatemala in 1954, with an American administration backing its first right-wing coup in the region, and the victorious Cuban Revolution in 1959, Latin American politics was always haunted by American interventionism and violent revolutionary movements backed or encouraged by Cuba or the Soviet Union.

In any case, neoliberalism was obviously lived and implemented differently than in the Global North where several degrees of welfare and modernization had prevailed *before* neoliberal policies became the new normal. The neoliberal project thus appeared to gain way less consensus than in the North and very often was seen as an alien force by many constituencies. Probably the crudest adoption of neoliberalism in the region (where to cut, when social spending is already very little; how to roll back the state, when the government didn't even control the territory or provide the very basic services and infrastructures) produced a faster and more aggressive social response to neoliberalism since the early 1990s. With the EZLN uprising in Southern Mexico, the rise of the indigenous movement in Ecuador or the forming of the cocalero movement in Bolivia, the first popular manifestos against neoliberalism came out from Latin America. In any case, the early negative effects of a neoliberal agenda that couldn't face the Latin American reality in the same terms than in the Global North, could be the main source of this 'pioneering' picture introduced above.

As for media, that rawer general picture was thoroughly emulated. Before the neoliberal momentum, some countries, such as Argentina or Chile, had created public broadcasters, but the total investment, audiences or relative importance of those stations were always small or weak (Porto, 2012). In general, television and radio broadcasting hence

were almost *de facto* in private hands since their inception in the region, contrary to what happened in Europe and more akin to the ‘corporate libertarianism’ (Pickard, 2014) of the United States. In Ecuador, as we have already underscored several times, the only public broadcaster was Radio Nacional del Ecuador, created by the Velasco Ibarra government in 1961, and the model which inspired the media system was always the American system, even in spite of the journalistic tradition in the country (Ayala Mora, 2012), closer to the literary and political elite conventions of France’s or Spain’s news media. In fact, journalism as an autonomous profession in the region was poorly developed beyond those 19th century newspapers functioning as tribunes for the most educated elites. Schools of journalism were scarce, inadequately funded and not professionalized, and there was little legislation about press freedom and free speech; levels of associationism were very low and differences between ownership obligations and professional management of media companies, as we saw in chapter 5, were vague. Media markets, in countries plagued with poverty and informal economy, besides weak government institutions, were obviously not well developed nor transparent for both advertisers and audiences in general.

The situation of media’s legal framework in Latin America was logically connected to this lack of interest in state-owned media institutions, probably also linked to the poor democratic culture in many nations; for instance, Argentina’s populist president Juan Perón, was almost forced to privatize the national public broadcaster briefly in 1953 to silence criticism of an authoritarian use of public media. In short, from the very beginning of the inception of television broadcasting in the 1950s (and the expansion of radio broadcasting) the state’s involvement, media regulations or legal provisions to shape mass media were

scarce or little ambitious; even compared to the United States of that era, the general picture was more 'libertarian' than Washington's legal framework. However, that didn't mean that governments were not involved in the system in one way or another. Through the possibilities of granting licenses to private companies, implementing tax policies, or investing public funds through advertising, politicians were implicitly a major player in opaque connections and shady policies over media; the most important lesson drawn from this context, which continued in the next era, was that those connections or clientelist ties between economic and political elites were always unspoken or concealed.

In this way, when the region implemented the neoliberal agenda in the 1980s and 1990s privatizing (or just abolishing) the scarce public media created in the previous decades and triggering liberalization processes, almost all Latin American media systems were affected by clear oligopolistic or solid monopolistic tendencies (Fox & Waisbord, 2002; Soledad Segura & Waisbord, 2016). Moreover, the products released by those new media conglomerates were extremely commercial, very often related to poor quality standards and not aiming to represent or to better reflect their respective societies as it was partially expressed in the United States and Europe. Possibly the clearest example of that was the Televisa media empire in Mexico vastly centered in manufacturing soap-operas or telenovelas producing and reproducing authoritarian, racist and pseudo-aristocratic views of the Mexican society. These low-cost local productions (traded in the region and abroad), besides the distribution of cheap American shows, marked the neoliberal era in Latin America. On top of that, those opaque agreements between political elites and economic elites continued consistently, although possibly now, the economic elites, with investments,

ownership or influence in oligopolist media conglomerates, had more influence over state officials and politicians. The general impression was a model in which strong clientelist ties (Hallin & Papatashanopoulos, 2002) and a pervasive patrimonialism (Segura & Waisbord, 2016) thrived organically forming a type of Liberal-Captured media system (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). Bringing this discussion to the terms delivered by the mediatization theories in the Global North, in Latin America, media found a contradictory mirror. While, following Strömback (2008), several technological and economic phases necessary for a full mediatization process were still lagging in the region, media conglomerates clearly dominated these societies, and at the same time the media's connections with traditional oligarchies and political power were an open secret similarly to the critical influence of media's owners over the political process in the region.

However, and notwithstanding this deep neoliberal reign and the problematic media environment that preceded and followed it, alternative discourses about the situation of the press and the media's role in the region contested these realities. Possibly, two books and one report that came up very often in academic and in-depth conversations during my fieldwork in Quito and Guayaquil, may epitomize the intellectual challenge to those transformations. The first discourse can be perfectly represented by Ariel Dorfman's and Armand Mattelart's *How to read Donald Duck*, published in 1971, in which media imperialism was introduced and carefully explained for the first time, and not only by uncovering the pure political economy of American entertaining industry, but also by decoding the content or values conveyed by foreign media over the local masses in Latin America. The second cultural manifestation delivering a contradictory approach towards

nascent neoliberalism was the McBride Report issued in 1981. With Nobel prize winner and former journalist Gabriel Garcia Márquez contributing as a member of the editorial committee, the report assessed media in a more similar way as it was framed in the United States and Europe during the social-democratic consensus, although this time focused on making professional and democratic media accessible to countries constituting the so-called Third World. A powerful concept coming out of that report –originally entitled *Many Voices, One World: Towards a new, more just and more efficient world information and communication order*– was the notion of ‘right of information’, or the conception of media as a space of citizens’ rights quite opposite to the aggressive commercialization that started to spread in the 80s. Finally, Jesús Martín-Barbero’s book, *De los Medios a las Mediaciones*, published in 1987, proposed an alternative view around popular media’s role in hegemonic discourses in the region, problematizing essentialist economy-based studies, and bringing the so-called cultural turn analysis to Latin America with a clear populist and Gramscian tone which possibly inspired many alternative and community media in Colombia (Martín-Barbero’s home country) and throughout Latin America.

So, as happened also with the more political or economic outcomes, media neoliberalism was also contested by relevant actors and deep intellectual discussions. But it would be a misinterpretation to think that these discourses were hegemonic or massively embraced; they simply existed as alternative options, available for those interested in criticizing neoliberalism while hundreds of telenovelas and sensationalist shows outnumbered any television or radio program centered on educational, cultural or more purely journalistic productions. When populism started to emerge as a reaction to these

contexts, neither Correa nor Chavez nor Cristina Fernández made media reform a central piece of their respective electoral platforms when they crystalized in the early 2000s. The problem with mainstream media for those political actors was always manifested on the go, after they started to rule their countries and media strongly contested their policies and political image. As analyzed in chapter 2, media wars were not pre-designed or planned ahead, but the result of how the new populist actors were challenged by the existing media system. Media reforms were reactive in some way, and not a carefully implemented political program inspired by the McBride's report or Dorfman's and Mattelart's analysis of media's political economy. Media reform was then a necessary political answer for the new type of relations that these actors, many of them populists, tried to construct, with more or less success, to replace a failing neoliberal consensus; it was then when those progressive views, alternative discourses or minority experiences, began to gain traction and started to fight for being hegemonic and, in the Ecuadorean case, the supporting theory of an intense media transformation.

1.3.- Conflictive symbioses

In conclusion, neither the 'independent press' in the Global North, nor the press in Latin America can be understood as naturally 'neutral' and 'apolitical'; at least if all these historical conditions and transformations are considered. Furthermore, since the neoliberal order appeared to be in decay in Latin America first, new configurations of the relationships between media and politics emerged in that region before than in other contexts, with prominent populist leaders starting to rule several nations, eliciting media reforms as we

highlighted above. If in the Post-War era, media and politics seemed contained by a pact (very limited in Latin America) fostering regulation and social responsibility, during the neoliberal rule media appeared to be disconnected, at least explicitly, with political actors and logics, assimilating a 'pure' commercial logic. Once the weak economic and political bases of this system collapsed in Latin America, a disoriented media also afflicted of financial problems, supported almost organically new populist actors to boost their audiences and perhaps to put some order into the system in the earlier 2000s.

However, when those populist actors tried to implement policies contrary to the usual neoliberal common sense (expanding the role of the state, limiting trade, favoring social/collective rights over individual rights, etc.) the media reacted vigorously adopting decidedly political goals and partisan lines. On the populist side, being born in societies dominated by oligopolistic commercial media, the new leaders appropriated media logics very quickly, as Rafael Correa's example fully corroborates. Additionally, this encounter was seen as a sort of clash between controlling powers that, at the end of the day, seemed to learn from each other. This is the context in which that 'conflictive symbiosis', addressed in chapter 3, began to take place; a process in which, while media was adopting a partisan stance, blatant propagandist methods or populist rhetoric, populist actors, eager to dispute media institutions' influence, were embracing media logics, and eventually triggered bold media reforms to control a media environment hostile to their political project. This was very well reflected, for instance, in famous television anchor Carlos Vera, transforming into a political actor, or in Correa's mutation into a showman running his own weekly program reaching global heights once Julian Assange was granted political asylum in the Ecuadoran

embassy in London. Media was politicized, or ‘populised’, turning into explicit political actors, and political actors were mediatized, turning into explicit media actors.

Adopting some basic categories drawn from symbiosis studies²⁴⁰, we classified these peculiar relationships following, very liberally, Douglas’s research (2008) on the “incidence and consequences of conflict in symbioses”²⁴¹. In short, media and populism in Ecuador appeared to feature a ‘conflictive’ interaction between two apparently autonomous but intimately linked logics, which could take the form of a ‘competition symbiosis’ (the struggle of both logics to obtain a shared resource), or a ‘mimicry symbiosis’ (one logic adopting characteristics of the other to alter its relationship with the field which is mimicked) of two expansionary forces. This can be seen in the way populism and media need each other, even if they are apparently adversaries, to survive in a world of constant flow of images, narratives and stories looking for audience (competition), or in the way populism and media copy from each other to prevail or make benefit at the expense of the opponent's attributes (mimicry). I believe that in the Ecuadorean case, these types of conflictive

²⁴⁰ All the cited categories are open interpretations of very specific cases and relationships discussed in biological sciences; for that reason, these renditions must be taken liberally as inspirations to make sense of complex social and political phenomena. Notions here used about different types of symbiotic relationships are taken from Douglas (2008), Egerton (2015) and Encyclopedia Britannica (2020).

²⁴¹ In her research Douglas introduces an original approach upon the symbiotic relationships between organisms (Douglas is a renowned entomologist) that elaborates on conflictive interactions and resolutions, challenging mainstream scholarship studying symbioses either as purely mutualistic relationships or as evolutionary competitive associations. I found this perspective, seemingly so far epistemologically from the social sciences, fascinating and somehow useful to unravel the complex relationships between media and populism (and possibly between media or politics with other fields) in Ecuador, Latin America and in other contexts. May it serve as a valuable bridge to observe phenomena thus far very difficult to classify beyond emptied signifiers, easy word combinations or catchy notions such as ‘hybrid’, ‘network’ or ‘system’. Moreover, the symbiosis figuration seems especially interesting because it allows to observe and comprehend phenomena on the go, without full completion but with likely different types of relationships. Finally, it is also fascinating that Douglas’ study on its part utilizes language and concepts originated in the field of political science (there is a direct reference to Robert Axelrod, an influential political scientist specialized on game theory, cybernetics and international relations) making in some way my reading a sort of round-trip travel.

symbioses can be observed, even when, with Correa out of power, a kind of ‘predation’ or ‘parasitism symbiosis’ seemed to be established once Moreno’s, and possibly Lasso’s administrations, were possibly captured by mainstream media’s capacities and vice versa, mainstream media putting themselves at the service of a political project *against* Correa.

However, there was another option for this kind of current symbiosis to exist beyond aggressive competition, mimicry or parasitism: ‘mutualism’²⁴², a form of relationship in which both species benefit from each other could be also observed. This type of relationship maybe happened during the last four or five years of Correa’s government when the Communication Law was passed, and a sort of new governmentality was imposed on media and journalism in the country. Of course, mainstream media was against any regulation or control over its management or business (many journalists working in that media were not, though, as we saw in chapter 4) but let’s recall the growing confidence of the Ecuadorean population in media when Correa’s policies were fully implemented, the expansion of media technologies under Correa, the improvement of journalists’ labor conditions and, as we discovered in chapters 4, 5 and 6, the increasing professionalization of media with Correa in power. This deep transformation, by the way, displayed authoritarian tones and adopted a clear top-down structure, but it made a strong difference and presented a positive balance compared with other experiences and eras. Of course, most of this revolution was gone when Correa’s populist leadership was out of the equation, but the central issue remained: since

²⁴² Let’s recall here to the casual or causal reader that in another unexpected exchange between biology and political theory, the notion of mutualist symbiosis was introduced by the Russian Piotr Kropotkin, one of the founders of Anarchism and a renowned zoologist. There are obvious connections between Kropotkin’s optimistic and communalist approach in biology with his views on economics and politics.

the relationship between populism and media had changed, their role in a common association needed to be critically revisited and rethought.

Obviously, some similarities may arise, intuitively, if using this conceptual model to look at populism and media in other countries and regions. Media polarization, fake news, misinformation and new forms of propaganda (set up by for profit algorithms or by old-style propagandist campaigns) are perhaps symptoms of a more global trend that we have seen in the Ecuadorean case. Other case studies and qualitative and quantitative analyses are needed to assess the capacity (or not) of this model to explain and understand how populism and media interact, but I defend that some theoretical work is needed to go beyond restrictive and anachronical political communication theories confining the relationship between populism and media to the interaction between the state, political parties and the news media as two separated logics. Perhaps those logics were separated once, after World War II and during the neoliberal consensus, but that is not the case anymore. This is clear in Ecuador and maybe in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela after the rise of left-wing populism, but it can also be plain to see in other more different cases. Donald Trump's phenomenon in the United States produces similar questions and scenarios in the American media system about a conflictive symbiosis between populism and media. In Spain, my home country, extremely analogous situations have happened with left-wing populism (Podemos's party or the progressive part of the Catalan pro-independence movement) and right-win populism (Vox's party or the ethno-national part of the Catalan pro-independence movement) disrupting a media system that was traditionally far from the more stable liberal or democratic corporatist settings. In short, these similarities, quite

credible in Latin America, the United States and Spain, have no reason not to occur in other contexts in the world with similar situations, where the media invade everything, and populism responds expanding itself on everything. Other models to study the relations between media and politics, such as media systems, not fully explored theoretically beyond Hallin and Mancini's seminal work (2004), could interact with this notion of symbiotic logics. Or, simply put, and following the classic Western media systems classification: we will need to move more towards global models of polarized populist media systems reflecting those interactions, instead of focusing on global commercial/liberal models addressing 'neutral' or 'objectivist' ideals that no longer hold the political and media realities of so many countries.

Finally, as a theoretical work in progress, or as a sort of tool to target an object that is alive and moving fast, the symbiosis model could be applied not only to classify active relations between populist and media actors to be frozen into solid categories, but also to follow and to evaluate those relations. Why don't we face that reality, avoiding looking to another side (or not to look at all) to find a compromise, or a type of learning-feeding relationship, that fits democratic criteria? In other words, instead of trying theoretically to separate those worlds, why don't we find a way to establish a 'mutual' positive co-existence where each entity can thrive producing a good outcome for a democratic society? The aforementioned 'mutualist symbiosis', glimpsed with Correa in power, could be an answer, with all those positive experiences and data reflecting a more professionalized journalism and a more diverse public sphere... But, alas, that situation was settled politically, and sometimes aggressively in Ecuador, by a powerful mediatized populist leader without much

intention (or real possibilities) to find a compromise with an arrange of social and political actors. Correa imposed the state to trigger his revolution: he won a decisive battle in the media war and there were results. But it was temporary and unstable, since once Correa left power, those changes vanished. Future contingent and contextual situations will tell how these highly dynamic processes crystallize in more institutionalized relations, and how that would affect those symbiotic relationships themselves (perhaps disappearing?) in more mundane and stable interactions.

2.- The revolution will be broadcasted: the state and journalism

In his famous song, Scott-Heron introduces two important assumptions that have also accompanied many discussions on media and politics in the last decades: mainstream media basically represent the *status quo* (commercialized or clearly capitalist in Scott-Heron's lyrics) and social change can only come *in spite of* or *from outside of* mainstream media. In other words, media –closely following the old structuralist Althusserian perspective, defining media as part of the ideological apparatus legitimizing the system– is a force relentlessly constructed against social or political change, and in that context, progressive transformations have to come from social movements and alternative venues almost detached of mainstream media's core institutions; hence Scott-Heron's famous title. In a less known media production, the documentary *The Revolution will not be televised*, directed by Irish authors Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain, narrates the events triggering and following the coup attempt in Venezuela of April 2002 in a similar way: Hugo Chavez was able to retain power and continued his national revolution in spite of mainstream media's

blatant campaign supporting the coup. The people, in short, convinced by Chavez's leadership and his first years of government, rose up and disrupted media which, supported by conservative domestic and foreign forces, was not covering any of the actual protests against the coup and manipulating the events.

This differentiation of the media as a field or a sphere different from society is not only made by alternative songs or auteur documentaries though. The discourse of an independent press or media as a neutral space where different political forces, views and perspectives share equal access, seem strangely connected with those ideas, although by its complete denial. If in many scholarly and public views about press freedom, populism and mediatization, media is considered more or less a neutral space and, in that way, is kept separated from the political sphere, in those alternative approaches, real social change also appears to be disconnected from the existing media; it is generated elsewhere. However, in the Venezuelan case, quickly after the aftermath of the 2002 coup, Hugo Chávez reacted by creating new public media and pushing media regulation in the country. These movements were not covered by Bartley's and O'Briain's documentary which, on the other hand, perfectly dissected Venezuelan mainstream media's flagrant manipulation and partisan allegiance. But it is important to notice that Chavez passed the Ley de Comunicación del Poder Popular the very same year of the coup, and just two years later, in 2004, the Ley de Responsabilidad Social de Radio y Television was enacted. Both laws reinforced state power over media, triggering bitter criticism in international media and press freedom organizations.

As we have seen in the Ecuadorean case, Correa's presidency experienced a similar process. Correa was notoriously supported by mainstream media (like Hugo Chávez) in a moment of deep institutional crisis, but once in power he encountered strong criticism from media. He was faster than Chavez in creating public media and in introducing the first provisions regarding media regulation, but Correa's media regime's full consolidation was maybe accelerated after the attempted coup in 2010. As we saw in chapter 3, these steps towards a new media regime, consisted of two distinct although clearly connected dimensions: Correa's mutation into a media star with *Enlace Ciudadano* disputing media's symbolic power, and the transformation of the political economy of the Ecuadorean media system, especially after the Communication Law was passed in 2013. Certainly, in Ecuador, Correa's revolution (his Citizen's Revolution, or his rather top-down media centric revolution with socio-economic implications) was literally televised, broadcasted and printed. In other words, in Ecuador, from the very beginning, as it can be verified by this study, the populist, social and economic transformation under Correa always depended on media; it didn't come from an outside, or from a different place (the civil society?) than Correa's electoral platform which was extremely mediatized from the very start. Ecuador's case thus not only brings to the fore the necessity to rethink seriously the relationship between media and populism, but also the demand to revisit the relation between political change and the media. In this case, we could claim, after analyzing carefully the Ecuadorean case, that there was not outside of media (mainstream or alternative, community or public, digital or legacy), any autonomous civil society housing political options able to disrupt the system in spite the media, no epic momentum detached or isolated from the media. As Laclau

explains about the discursive heterogeneity of politics and populism (Laclau considers populism the very basic logic of politics), “the distinction between the inside and the outside has to be replaced by a more complex game in which nothing is ever fully internal or fully external” (2005: 152-153).

To this extent, we may say that mediatization theories are right: media are so central in contemporary societies that their primary position cannot be neglected. What those theories got wrong, –and this is possibly linked to the national or regional origin of those theories²⁴³, derived from contexts of pretty stable social and media systems–, is to think that a sort of a neutral media logic (also not fully explored in its internal aporia) rules over other logics and fields without any exchange or conflict. This reality is pretty clear in Ecuador and Latin America, but also claiming that a sort of media logic is above of political fights or policy discussions may contradict many other national and regional contexts where commercialism meets political stances, professionalism seems to be increasingly bounded by commercial pressures and partisan lines, and media technology and evolving formats echo and boost political struggles *ad infinitum*. It is precisely because media and populism are at stake at the same time, that the revolution can only be televised, broadcasted, printed or tweeted.

²⁴³ Most contributions to mediatization theories are originated in Nordic and Central European countries, comprising what Hallin and Mancini call ‘Democratic Corporatist media systems’ (2004). Many of those countries are the most advanced liberal democracies, with the best scores in almost any aspect, from Gini indexes to quality measurements of democratic institutions. Recalling the social-democratic conditions outlined above facilitating the independent press, together with softer changes adopting pro-commercial neoliberal policies, if there are places in the world where media may seem more ‘neutral’, ‘professional’, or ‘public service oriented’, they must be situated in those nations.

2.1.- The return of the state: current models and questions from the past

Certainly, a key lesson drawn from the Ecuadorean case examining the results of Correa's media reform is that it largely improved the situation of Ecuador's public sphere and journalistic autonomy compared to the previous era in an apparently counter-intuitive manner. What seemed for many Western eyes as an authoritarian act using the state power against the free press, was a conflictive and often top-down transformation led by a leftist populist leader clearly positioned against the traditional elites and displaying an inclusive understanding of the people signifier. There was a progressive view behind state's expansion policies in Ecuador, including of course, the creation of new public media and the passing of the Communication Law. And the results came in. A different, more plural, diverse, and well informed public sphere was facilitated. In this way, this positive reform forces us in the first place to discuss further the role of the state in creating or facilitating the institutions and conditions for journalistic professionalism and a better public sphere; additionally, Ecuador's case may also push us to question what other media reforms led by right wing populist have done to other media systems and public spheres throughout the world.

So to speak, the Ecuadorean case situates us in a double crossroad. First, facing a declining neoliberal order, Correa's media reform, with all its imperfections, arbitrariness and authoritarian top-down situations, recalled the regulatory era that followed World War II, and actually the Ecuadorean media actions accompanied neo-Keynesian redistributive economic policies similar to those implemented in the 1950s and 1960s. Although with two important distinct facets: contrary to the 50s and 60s, the public sphere that emerged during Correa was plural, diverse and polarized; secondly, the whole process was led by a

mediatized populist leader and not by a formal political and social consensus²⁴⁴. In the second place, however, when thinking about populism's interaction with the state and media, it is inevitable to think about the other existing option challenging the neoliberal consensus, very influential in many places: a media populist conservative revolution, also implemented in media policies or directly capitalized by clearly partisan media companies. There would be, in sum, two models competing to replace the declining order: one model ideally using the state to promote positive freedoms (Gandeha, 2018: 62-63) boosting journalistic autonomy and promoting a more plural public sphere, and a second model using the state to support a restored nationalist (very often overtly racist), heteronormative and patriarchal/authoritarian (Gandeha, 2018: 61) world. There is not any in-depth research about the specific influence of right wing populist regimes on journalistic professionalism, but several critical reports by organizations such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders or Human Rights Watch alert of journalists' persecution and press freedom violations under these regimes. Given the problems that we encountered with these reports assessing the Ecuadorean case, more work is necessary to fully understand the roots and scope of those transformations experienced in those rightwing populist regimes.

Correa's revolution, moreover, put the spotlight on the role of the state and the law in the creation of independent and democratic journalism, whereas far-right populism appears to stress an alleged lack of fair coverage of an alternative vision to the hegemonic liberal world. The contrast between those goals don't make Correa's reforms intrinsically

²⁴⁴ In this way, as we discussed in chapter 4, Correa's case recalls Peron's situation in Argentina in the 40s, finely described by Cane (2011) or Roosevelt's complex interaction with the press in the 30s in the United States, as highlighted by Lebovic (2016).

illiberal, reactionary or patriarchal. Possibly what Ecuador primarily shows is the ultimate need of the state to correct a market that without restrictions or delimitations, tends to produce monopolies in media systems, sweeps away pluralism, and corrodes professionalism. Far-right populism in power, however, is not contrary to commercialism but rather focuses on the ideological line or discourse delivered by for profit media organizations. Regimes such as those of Hungary, Poland or the United States under Trump (or American states governed by populist Republicans) don't discuss commercial pressures on journalists or the lack of democracy in the media, but the liberal hegemonic discourse promoted by mainstream media and are focused on supporting partisan media. Actually, if the media can be captured and turned into partisan bullhorns, right wing populists may not need to use the state or any legislation. For right wing populism, most of the times well connected with powerful corporations and wealthy donors, state interventions don't seem designed as corrections of the market to expand positive press freedom; Kelly (2020) obliquely notices this when he claims, following a strong negative freedom approach, that leftwing populism is more dangerous for press freedom. Conservative populists, in any case, would use the state as a conduct to threat only the not ideologically aligned media, and as a machine to produce political propaganda supporting their base. Of course, we can see similar cases of intimidation and governmental propaganda in Correa's Ecuador, but the ideological core is different. Even though Correa's populist leadership contained illiberal elements (let's recall his lack of respect of institutional boundaries), many goals of the Communication Law and the idea of public media expansion are not illiberal at all. They are rather quite 'liberal', at least in the meaning that this word had before the neoliberal turn in the 80s or still has in

Anglo-Saxon countries, where liberal positions tend to be often associated with a strong state intervention, redistributive policies and legislative and regulatory actions to monitor and improve mass media.

Finally, I believe that revisiting questions and naturalized claims about the past to understand our current problems must be also a fundamental task, besides clarifying the historical conditions of the independent press and of acknowledging the problematic symbiosis between populism and media. In that sense, the fixed idea settled in the scholarship and in the public discussion of understanding journalism as a profession and field separated from the action of the state, or emerging almost organically linked to the market must be challenged. Experiences such as the United States or Europe in the Post-war era and Ecuador and other Latin American countries during the collapse of the neoliberal consensus, have to be brought back to the discussion to understand how positive settings for professional journalism were created and how they can be updated. Contexts largely highlighted as fundamental for the birth of professional journalism, such as the emergence of the penny press in the United States and the rise of the first media markets, need to be reexamined and further explored to assess fully what was the role of the state and other actors or institutions in the beginning of this professionalization process.

Since the Ecuadorean case demonstrates that the state can play a key role in facilitating or boosting journalistic professionalism, it should be of an outmost interest to go back to the first manifestations of professionalism and its development to reevaluate whether existing theories (Schudson 2003; Starr, 2004) are not reflecting their neoliberal discursive context over the past, displacing a more detailed examination of the actual interactions taking

place between the press, political and social actors and the state in the second half of the Nineteenth century and the first decades of the Twentieth century. In the American context, Mindich (1998) has noticed the role taken by the United States Secretary of War, led by Edwin M. Stanton, in the creation of essential journalistic techniques such as the inverted pyramid, contradicting approaches only centered in the almost spontaneous emergence of markets and professional guilds. Delporte (1999), working on the French case, underscores two basic institutions behind the professionalization of journalism: The so-called ‘Loi de la Liberté de Presse²⁴⁵’, passed in 1881, and the rise of journalists unions’ influence in French newsrooms in the 1920s and 1930s. None of these historians reject the importance of media markets and the expansion of mass media to explain professionalism and the transformation of journalism, but they also point out the importance of other actors and institutions, such as government agencies, innovative legislation or unions, to understand how journalists began to see themselves as professional and autonomous. The French case is especially meaningful for Correa’s Ecuador, since during fieldwork several policy-makers close to the populist government recalled the existence of this law to support Correa’s media reform, besides the innovative legal concepts that this legislation introduced²⁴⁶. But the main question remains: what was the role of the state, social actors or specific institutions in the creation and development of professional journalism, always understood by its autonomy, professional principles and practices and public service orientation? Even in the United States, it is more

²⁴⁵ ‘Press Freedom Act’.

²⁴⁶ Cheered when passed as France’s foundational and most liberal act regarding press freedom and free speech, this law introduced legal concepts such as the right of reply and rectification, publisher’s legal responsibility for the information conveyed, or sanctions over conscious dissemination of ‘false news’ or because of ‘racist defamation’.

than arguable that the whole professionalization process happened to be an almost poetic force coming out from a news market, cheap newspapers and fresh job positions in private businesses advancing technologically.

2.2.- Media ‘revolutions’ today: Latin American and Global North experiences

Going back to current events, thus far, Latin America has been the only region in the world that has introduced a direct discussion of the necessity of deep media reforms, precisely when some kind of socio-economic change was carried out. However, that explicit debate doesn’t exclude the existence of events in which specific media policies have come out without much analysis or commentary. While the passing of ‘interventionist’ laws to regulate media in Latin America was met with lively discussions about press freedom, restrictions to the independent press or media ownership’s limitations, actions such as Twitter’s and Facebook’s decisions to cancel Donald Trump’s accounts in early 2021, or the European Union’s recommendation to ban RT and Sputnik News (both owned by the Russian state) during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, didn’t trigger much debate around those actions and the roots behind those decisions. But a kind of version of media regulation was embedded in all those events which, at the end of the day, dealt with problematic ‘conflictive symbioses’ between populism and media or just surgical measures against sources of propaganda and misinformation. Furthermore, this is of course not the space to discuss other type of technological and incipient anti-trust regulations addressing the monopolistic tensions created by gigantic ‘media platforms’ (even though they consciously avoid that label) such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft or Apple. But it

should be noticed that when dealing with media regulation or deep media reform, the activity of these huge corporations, which control the production, flow and target of enormous amounts of data, most of the times following a monopolistic and opaque commercial logic, is also triggering a conversation on the urgent need to find a way to delimit their processes under democratic institutions and the rule of law; a formidable task, on the other hand, since much of these corporations have global reach and their budgets (and influence) exceed the size of many of the world's most affluent nation-states.

But even if in important countries in Latin America deep media regulation and reform have been set in motion with polarized and dramatic debates, scholarly conferences, research journals and relevant academic venues in the Global North don't seem especially interested in an in-depth discussion of media regulation even in the age of fake news, disinformation and polarization; only minority voices (Freedman, 2018; Pickard, 2020) have drawn attention to this issue. Something very similar has happened in the public opinion: in spite of those debates from Latin America, Trump's problems with social media, or the spread of new forms of propaganda, few leaders, social movements, political parties or journalism associations have called for a serious conversation on media regulation.

Why this is happening would be the perfect topic for a whole different study or book, but if we place a Latin American mirror in front of the Global North problems with media and populism, some answers could be suggested. First, the neoliberal consensus has not collapsed in the West in the same way it did in Latin America. Libertarian discourses about press freedom and journalism are still strong, and they have their economic-political base. Furthermore, in relevant affluent countries in Central and Northern Europe, with a strong

legacy from the regulatory era, many of the most serious problems derived from the neoliberal collapse (such as the effects of the Great Recession) have had a limited impact. Only a handful of left-wing leaders (many of them eligible to be labeled populists) have called for some kind of media regulation to improve and reinforce independent journalism in the West, and this topic hasn't seemed to be very central in their political agenda²⁴⁷. The unique solid challenge to the neoliberal consensus and that libertarian discourse in the Global North has been led by right-wing populist leaders and governments; this is pretty evident in Eastern Europe with Hungary²⁴⁸ and Poland²⁴⁹ passing media laws to expand and control public media from centralized governmental instances. In the United States, a Republican party heavily transformed into a far-right populist platform under Trump, have pushed for similar and different paths, escalating monopolistic tendencies for friendly media conglomerates (such as the conservative Sinclair group in local news), imposing conservative ideological agendas from State legislatures or just promoting synergies with an aligned media camp clearly captained by Fox News, the most watched cable television channel in the country.

However, a second answer, evidently linked to the former, of why discussions about media regulation and state intervention seem to be scarce in academia and public discussions in the Global North, may be in the absence of the political conditions needed for that

²⁴⁷ Let's recall Bernie Sanders' much isolated op-ed in the Columbia Journalism Review, cited in chapter 4. Even Podemos in Spain, or Jeremy Corbin in the UK, didn't go beyond vague appeals to fund public and community media, or to increase some public service obligations.

²⁴⁸ See more at <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/12/03/new-report-hungary-dismantles-media-freedom-and-pluralism/>

²⁴⁹ See more at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35257105>

conversation to happen. As we have seen in Ecuador and other Latin American cases, media reforms were triggered when the new populist leaders in power started to be targeted by mainstream media (in many cases, as we saw in Ecuador, delivering or supporting false news and political propaganda), and in the West only right wing populists happen to be in power, effectively implementing media laws. So, from leftist, liberal, social-democratic or centrist positions, the idea of media regulation or state intervention is stuck associated to authoritarian regimes or extreme right policies, and, at the same time, perhaps with the exception of Syriza's experience in Greece, none of the Global North governments have been ruled by a left-wing populist actor.

This is how paradoxical the panorama is: while in Latin America the fall of the neoliberal consensus has been associated with the Pink Tide and left-wing populist leaders, in the Global North the response to the crisis of the neoliberal model has been widely capitalized by right wing populist actors, even if at the aftermath of the 'occupy movements' in 2011 and the new political leaderships in the United States and Europe, the situation appeared to be similar to Latin America. Furthermore, cases such as Brazil's Bolsonaro, the Philippines under Duterte or India with Modi seem to verify this hegemonic conservative populist *zeitgeist* isolating the Latin American progressive case which, however, has gained some traction in the last years. Andrés Manuel López Obrador's presidency in Mexico since 2018, the return to power of Peronists in Argentina in 2019, the election of Pedro Castillo as Peru's president in 2021, or Gabriel Boric's election the same year as the new Chilean president by a large majority of the vote against Jose Antonio Kast, a far-right populist leader of the likes of Hungary's Orban or Brazil's Bolsonaro, are solid evidence of a Pink Tide

renaissance in the region. These renewed political conditions in Latin America after a conservative *interregnum* (shorter than expected) will feed, most likely, further discussions about media reform and state intervention.

In sum, it seems as if the ‘televised revolution’ witnessed in Ecuador might have three different options today and in the near future. One could be the context actually present in Latin America, where left-wing populism would continue to push for media regulation and positive interventions on the media system (increasing representation and pluralism, for instance) to further support an agenda of Keynesian redistributive policies. Another might be an opposite system, introduced by right-wing populism, adopting negative interventions on the media system (reducing representation and pluralism) and an inconsistent media regulation (sometimes pro market, sometimes against the market) reflecting political and ideological allegiances with populism in power and its idea to restore the nation-state, heteronormative institutions and patriarchal authority combined with distinct types of welfare *chauvinism*. The third option would be to continue with business as usual implementing *ad hoc* policy actions or extinguishing the fires created by a decaying neoliberalism that is not directly challenged in their economic, cultural or media dimensions.

This last undefined position is the situation in which perhaps most countries and media systems still are. Already contaminated with increasing polarization and authoritarian right-wing populist leaderships (marking their respective conflictive symbioses), many regions and nations face the big question of the media as a map uncharted. Although a new Keynesian consensus appeared to be forming in the first months of Biden’s Administration in the United States (supported in the US Congress by numerous leftwing leaders, some of

them, clearly populist), and during the management of the Covid 19 pandemic, many of the promised policies are stalled and a discussion about media regulation has never been in the agenda. Something similar is happening in the European Union, with persistent ordoliberal attitudes especially in the most affluent countries from the North, blocking ‘federalist’ policies able to redistribute wealth in one of the richest regions in the planet. The United States remaining an enigma with the not so unlikely scenario of becoming a full populist regime after the return of Donald Trump to power, the Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to excite militarism and conservative stances at the same time of condemns Putin’s regime as the eternal ally of rightwing populism throughout the world. In any case, the situation could not be more worrying. Profound reforms, progressive revolutions in its media dimension (obviously reflecting changes in economic policies) are not only urgent to create or restore a free and autonomous journalism, but probably also absolutely necessary for there really to be a future on the planet, avoiding the more than possible return to an authoritarian past.

Postscript: Leftwing populism and media in future Ecuador

I do not want to finish this study without discussing what could be the future in Ecuador from the experience lived with Correa in power and the shift produced by Moreno reversing most of Correa’s policies, from the populist president’s economic measures to the deep media transformation we have been discussing in all these pages. Thus, drawing from the arguments exposed above and several events detailed in chapter 6, I will use these

concluding paragraphs to speculate on what kind of future policies we might expect for the fascinating Ecuadorean case.

Guillermo Lasso's unexpected electoral victory in April 2021 in the last presidential race in Ecuador has already produced many comments on *Correismo's* inability to attract the support from other progressive groups in the country, such as the indigenous movement or other social-democratic and leftist parties and collectives. Math is stubborn, and in the run-off, Andrés Arauz, the almost unknown candidate appointed by Correa who was the most voted in the first run, didn't get any endorsements from other political groups, eventually losing the election. In contrast, the former banker and eternal candidate against Correa gathered way more votes than in the first run, benefiting especially from the traditional parties, such as conservative Partido Social Cristiano, the indigenous Pachakutik and the social-democratic Izquierda Democrática. In conclusion, it seems that Lasso ended up remaking his candidacy as a sort of anti-Correa platform able to defeat the ghost (or the menace of a return) of the former president, even if the ideological line of almost 70% of the vote happened to be progressive or leftist²⁵⁰. This picture matches perfectly that anti-populist populism present in news content in 2018 that we highlighted in chapter 6, and it is more than possible that this Antipopulist-captured media system persisted over the years. The lack of coverage by domestic media of Lasso's implication in the so-called Pandora papers, made public in October 2021, lead us to think that the alliance between the government and private media remains intact with Lasso in power. Regarding media policies, President Lasso's

²⁵⁰ Let's recall that in the first run, the sum of the *Correista* Arauz (32.72%), Pérez for Pachakutik (19.39%) and Hervas for Izquierda Democrática (15.68%) plus other small parties made 70% of the votes gathered. All of the political parties cited are, at least formally, leftist, progressive or social democratic, supporting economic policies very similar to those implemented in the Correa era.

straightforward neoliberal agenda is well reflected in his project to further empty the Communication Law, already reformed during Moreno's presidency, to turn it into a sort of hollow shell. According to the draft presented to the national Assembly in December 2021, 94% of the articles would be repealed, with only the commitment to continuing with the legal support of national media production. Lasso has also expressed his plans to sell the public media created by Correa. If the new reform of the reform is passed, Ecuador's legal and institutional context will go back to a state very similar to the one before Correa. That trend, in any case, was clearly visible in the news content published in 2018.

There are obvious parallelisms with actions taken upon any other policy or institution created during Correa's presidency. Following a neoliberalism by the book path, the current administration is changing the legal context of higher education (the government agency set by Correa to guarantee quality and access is about to be repealed to liberalize higher education), privatizing public companies (the state-owned Banco del Pacifico, a profitable bank, is about to be sold), reforming labor conditions (Lasso's plans to improve formal or adequate employment are centered on lowering labor regulations and social security contributions) and shifting tax codes (increasing taxes for the precarious middle classes, providing breaks for businesses and corporations). At the same time, even with oil prices skyrocketing, economic recession and declining living standards are looming the country; Ecuador, for the first time since the aftermath of *Feriado Bancario* in the early 2000s is producing a net emigration balance²⁵¹, with individuals risking their lives to reach, above all, the United States' territory. With the solid alliance between private media and the

²⁵¹ See more at <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-10-13/los-ecuatorianos-vuelven-a-huir-a-estados-unidos-empujados-por-la-pobreza.html>

government (besides Lasso's control over the underfunded and now irrelevant public media), there is a good chance that little of these policies (and their effects) is being discussed in the public sphere. For instance, the only media that has published some news about the worrying data highlighting the renewed Ecuadorean immigration to the United States through Central America was Spain's *El Pais*, and without too much explanation of the causes of the phenomenon.

Ecuador, however, happens to be an isolated beacon of conservatism in the region. Since former president Inazio 'Lula' da Silva is very likely to win the next election in Brazil, or even Colombia could be ruled by a progressive administration for the first time in decades, Ecuador is a clear 'deviant-case' in Latin American politics today. The reason to this question is well beyond our means at this point, given also that the most voted parties were progressive, although it is more than possible that the last changes in media policy and the termination of media wars may be at the root of the causes of this estrange situation of what was one of the most progressive nations in the region. Correa's exclusive vertical populism, denouncing evil enemies of the people at his right and left (especially around the indigenous movement) may be also at the source of the problem, but perhaps following the logics observed by this study there may be two open scenarios with implications in the media system and on the parasitism symbiosis we already talked about. On the one hand, Lasso may be able to turn Ecuador into a sort of new Colombia, where leftwing options would be stalled in an Antipopulist swamp that would attract the interest of many centrists and conservative groups in the region. Or, more likely, on the other hand, the shrinking economic conditions (produced by the renewed neoliberal policies), the dysfunctional political class

and the blatant media collusion could lead shortly to a representation crisis or a nihilistic moment very similar to that one experienced in 2005-2006. Correa himself may take advantage of that momentum (also supported by other Latin American governments) or perhaps a new populist leadership may emerge.

It is striking how in the Ecuadorean case history rhymes; if in the early 2000s the indigenous movement was behind important upheavals preceding the major disrupting moment that paved the way to Correa, now the indigenous uprising in 2019 may precede a more transversal-led revolt in the near future. In the same way, the critical role played by the indigenous movement in Ecuadoran politics continues to be deceptive. If two decades ago they endorsed Lucio Gutiérrez, a populist candidate that basically once in power addressed none of his electoral promises, in 2021, Pachakutik's candidate, Yaku Pérez, endorsed by the movement, helped Lasso to be elected. Fiercely against anything close to Correa (for instance, Pérez celebrated Evo Morales's deposition in 2019, accusing Morales of being a dictator and refusing to talk about a coup to possibly the indisputable champion of the indigenous cause in Latin America), his total lack of support to Arauz's candidacy helped critically to put Lasso in power. As a consequence, the indigenous movement appears to be currently split between supporters and detractors of Pérez's stance against the *Correismo* camp, and it is of an utmost importance to see how the indigenous movement will react to the upcoming protests and revolts.

Inevitably the media will respond to likely dramatic scenarios, and a new full media populism moment may take the stage, completing the cycle. However, contrary to what occurred in the past, Correa's experience will be there, and different configurations will

emerge. Possibly new media and alternative venues coming out from local radios and digital environments will play a major role in the upcoming transformation. Drawing from some conclusions from my fieldwork and conversations with several informants, possibly a new kind of media war, with new media actors, will emerge before and while a new presidency starts to apply, almost inevitably, very similar policies to those implemented in the Correa era. These new media actors will play a major role, and will work as a bridge between a state reconquered by leftwing populism and media actors embracing journalistic professionalism and confronting effectively the Antipopulist environment. In that way, the next progressive populist leadership would be different from Correa and perhaps more similar to the figures such as Gabriel Boric, the new leftist Chilean president. New and more experiences on Youtube, Tik Tok or other platforms following the example of shows such as 'De leva y a fondo' produced by the independent 'Ingobernables', one of the few diverse digital media in the country, will see their audience dramatically expanded. Very likely, the new government will be challenged by mainstream media, but if the post-Correa progressive forces in Ecuador are able to maintain that bridge and are capable to institutionalize and make 'normal' journalistic professionalism without aggressive impositions, a new peak will be gained in the consecution of a country with a healthy, open and diverse public sphere. Of course, this goal of a new televised revolution will be absolutely necessary for Ecuador to get out of underdevelopment and poverty.

APPENDIX:

1.- Code book:

Title:

Project measuring populism and media reform on Ecuador's two major newspapers, *El Comercio* and *El Universo*. Over years 2005-2006, 2015-2016, and 2018.

Case ID: 000

Title

Paper:

1. El Comercio
2. El Universo

Date: (mm/dd/yyyy)

Size:

1. More than full page (more than two pdf pages)
2. Full page/almost full page -> double page (more than 1 to 2 pdf pages)
3. More than half a page -> One page (1 full pdf page)
4. One third -> Half a page (half pdf page)
5. Brief -> One third of a page (third pdf page)

Photo:

0. No photo
1. Photo

Type/Genre:

1. News
2. Chronicle (narration of a specific event the day before, or in the past)
3. Analysis
4. Interview
5. Feature/reportage (including portraits, profiles, several voices; sometimes using verbs present tense)

6. Brief (short news)
7. Editorial
8. Opinion
9. Invited Opinion
10. Letters to the editor
98. Other

Location:

1. Politics/Current Affairs (for El Comercio)
2. Opinion
3. Ecuador/National
4. Special issue
5. Other (related to...)

Subject (pick no more than two subjects):

1. Elections (all kind)
2. Government's policies and actions
3. Laws and referenda, prosecution, legal-procedures (court cases included)
4. Corruption, alleged misuse, transparency policies
5. Local/regional issues and policies
6. Political coalitions and alliances
7. Protest/Strike
8. Security/crime/police
9. Media issues, policy and press freedom
10. Democracy (broad issues about civil rights, participation, equality, freedom, etc)
11. Historical, anniversary, national memory
12. Economy and economic policies (including trade, transportation, development policies, agriculture, infrastructure works)
13. Education
14. Social issues: health, welfare, housing, immigration; including children and youth, social security, pensions, consumer rights, etc.

15. Culture, arts, heritage
16. Environmental-ecological issues
17. Gender (especially women related) issues
18. LGTBI and other diversity issues
19. Indigenous communities issues (social indigenous problems)
20. Indigenous political movements
21. Afro-Ecuadorian communities
22. Natural hazard, accidents
23. Disrupting political event (coup d'etat, social upheaval, state of emergency, etc)
24. Rafael Correa (when story is focused mostly on leader)
25. Lenin Moreno (idem)
26. Oficialismo (focused exclusively on)
27. Opposition (idem)
28. Alianza PAIS (idem)
29. Guillermo Lasso, CREO/SUMA (idem)
30. PSC (idem)
31. Izquierda Democrática (idem)
32. Sociedad Patriótica (idem)
33. Partido Roldosista (idem)
34. Other political parties or politicians
35. Lucio Gutierrez (when article focused on the person)
36. Abdalá Bucaram (idem)
37. Alfredo Palacio (idem)
38. Alvaro Noboa (idem)
39. Jaime Nebot (idem)
40. Cynthia Viteri (idem)
41. US-Ecuador and US issues
42. Europe politics EU-Ecuador
43. Latin-America politics Latam-Ecuador
44. Ecuador-Colombia border and other

45. China politics China-Ecuador
46. Julian Assange
47. Religion and ethics
48. NGO's activities
49. Theoretical/ideas discussion
50. Oil/Petroleum
51. Military
52. Racism/Classism
53. Other general Foreign Affairs issues, United Nations, etc
54. Rectification
98. Other

Origin of the story:

0. Undetermined
1. President/Government statement or action
2. Ministers and secretaries action
3. Other State administration officials statement or action (Agencies, Cordicom and Supercom included here)
4. Local/provincial admin action
5. Law proposal or bill supported by government
6. Parliament actions and law/legislation supported by majority or specific political parties
7. Social movement leader or member action (not indigenous)
8. Politician (left) action
9. Politician (oficialismo) action (when left/right cleavage is not used in the story but the oficialismo/opposition dialectic)
10. Politician (opposition) action (idem)
11. Politician (right) action
12. Politician transversal action
13. Political parties action (several of them, together)

14. Civil society associations action
15. Journalism/media association/institution (domestic or foreign) press release or action
16. Unions action
17. Business organization/association action
18. Legal/courts document, judiciary (including prosecutors and lawyers, and CPCCS) action
19. Indigenous movement action (also for indigenous political organizations' actions)
20. Reporter/author initiated
21. Unverified (unchecked or not clear source) document or statement
22. Report (no economy) public and governmental
23. Non governmental organization (no economy) action
24. Election/Referendum results
25. Polls and surveys
26. Social protest, individual or collective unclaimed actions
27. Natural hazard, accidents
28. Economic report government
29. Economic report public institutions (including public Universities, etc)
30. Economic report private institution (including private Universities, etc)
31. International organization action
32. US Embassy or other US
33. European Embassy or other
34. China Embassy or other
35. Latin American country Embassy or other Latam related
36. Higher Education institutional, professional, researcher action
37. Media/cultural event or action (an article, a film premiered, a book published, an event echoed from other medium, sports event, etc)
38. Religious event, religious organization action
39. Economic operation, performance or transaction
40. Army member, representatives action

- 41. Police action (no courts involved)
- 42. Emergency services, health-care services, etc (Fire rescue, hospitals, etc) action
- 43. Specific business/company action (no public or state-owned companies)
- 98. Other

Politics frame:

How politics is presented by the reporter/journalist/opinion leader; and/or the way the subject (subject itself can define politics; v.g. social protests and strikes connote conflict) presents politics. Politics can be presented as a legal/bureaucratic/technical process; as a conflictive field, as a sport-like activity, as a problem/solution process (following a civic-issue focused logic), as a noble task, or as a corrupt, evil or vicious business. The story can be associated to processes and values (for instance when the article informs about a strike, a national dialogue about social welfare, or an opinion article discusses about ethics) presenting politics in a specific manner; also, stories can relate to current political leaders or organizations using a most dominant and least dominant political angle (when a political leader, for instance, is presented as pacific and pro-dialogue, or, in contrast, as controversial or polemic). The mention of politics, political parties or politicians has to be explicit.

- 0. N/A
- 1. *Politics as a legal-professional process* (language is formal, full of bureaucratic and technical terms, involves a large political knowledge of the political and legal system; it usually has a legal and technocratic tone)
- 2. *Politics as a sport-game* (frames politics as a sports activity, politics here is a **competition among actors** where **issues are not as important** as the result of the competition)
- 3. *Politics as conflict* (politics here is the struggle of two or several camps challenging to each other; here politics is understood as a friend-enemy relationship, there's always and **'us versus them' logic**)

4. *Politics as dialogue, compromise, problems and solutions* (politics here means that several political groups or social actors reach, or must reach, a compromise to solve some issues; **issues and public interest problems are important**)
5. *Politics as a noble task* (Highly related to the previous one but mostly praising the **job of politicians as one performed by the best** citizens, a superior, difficult task or profession that the best and more morally qualified individuals perform)
6. *Politics disenchantment* (politics (or politicians in general) is **dirty**, waste of time, an elite affair, it can't be changed, it **doesn't work, it is corrupted, false** etc)

Controlling political actors

Measuring personalization of politics and which type of actor dominates politics. Listing the times politicians' names are referred compared to political parties, political organizations, social movements (with special interest in labor, indigenous and diversity social groups) and other actors (as courts or interests groups). Headlines are important to point out the main controlling actor (if reflects a leader's quote but the story talks about parties, leader would be the controlling actor and vice versa with other actors)

0. N/A
1. Political leader dominant (more than 3 times, or 1 without any mention to political party)
2. Political party dominant (more than 3 times, or 1 without mention to political leader)
3. Social movement dominant, including here indigenous movements (more than 3 times, or 1 without mention to political party or political leader)
4. Government/president/ministers/mayors etc (more than 3 times or 1 without mention to political party or political leader)
5. Others

Ideology spectrum and ideological consistency

More information below. To be more systematic, when coding stories from Politics and Opinion section, try to code ideology (do not chose N/A); when coding stories

Nation/Society section chose N/A when ideology through political parties or opinion is not clearly represented. If in Politics' and Opinion section, ideology is not clear, choose 'transversal'.

0. N/A
1. Left-focused (clearly shows a leftist political spectrum as specified at remarks section via ideas or political parties representation)
2. Right-focused (shows right/conservative political spectrum as specified at remarks section via ideas or political parties representation)
3. Transversal (two or several ideological sides are presented; if it is not clear (when in Politics section) or two (or more) different parties or ideologies are represented.

Broad political parallelism:

Measuring the ideological/partisan color of medium in a specific way. The content must take a stance clearly supporting or rejecting a political party, a politician, the government, specific institutions or actors, etc. This study is aware that sometimes content could be supportive implicitly, or that support or critique may be very subtle. To be more systematic, **only very clearly supportive or critical** content must be coded under this rubric.

Negative political parallelism:

0. N/A
1. Critical on the government
2. Critical on the opposition
3. Critical on political party. Name when is one or two max:
4. Critical on Correa or Correa's regime
5. Critical on a politician. Name when is one or two max:
6. Critical on a specific institution/business. Name:
7. Critical on the left
8. Critical on the right
9. Critical on a independent political party/leader (not clear if it is left or right)

10. Critical on social movements. Name:
11. Critical on Indigenous movements
12. Critical on Populism
13. Critical foreign government
14. Other
- Positive political parallelism:*
15. Supporting the government
16. Supporting of the opposition
17. Supporting one specific political party
18. Supporting Correa
19. Supporting one specific person. Name:
20. Supporting one specific institution/business. Name:
21. Supporting the left
22. Supporting the right
23. Supporting transversal politicians (not clear right or left)
24. Supporting religious organization
25. Supporting of social movements
26. Supporting of Indigenous movements
27. Supporting foreign government
28. Other

The people:

Coded when the concept of ‘people’, associated to different words, is explicitly mentioned as a reference (source or author) to the people. Different Spanish terms can be identified with the populist ‘people’. In our case we focus on these terms: *pueblo, patria, nación, gente, las mayorías, mandato popular, voluntad soberana*.

0. N/A
1. Positive connotation (when nothing else is added)
2. Negative connotation
3. People (positive) exclusively as the nation

4. People (positive) exclusively as the citizenship
5. People (positive) exclusively as the poor
6. People (positive) representing a specific social group (v.g indigenous or original peoples)
7. People as a neutral noun

Enemies of the people/excluded group

Coding when article refers explicitly to a threat/enemy of the Ecuadorean people or Ecuador; or whether article speaks in the name of Ecuador or ‘the people’, ‘the nation’, etc and there’s an actor/a group that is specifically problematic for the country.

0. N/A
1. The rich/oligarchy
2. Immigrants
3. The queer
4. Women/Feminist
5. Politics/political class/parties indistinctively
6. Specific politician/leader, political party/organization
7. Specific social organization/movement
8. The Government
9. Rafael Correa
10. The foreign powers (US, China, Europe)
11. The Opposition
12. The Media
13. Corporations
14. Banks
15. Business men
16. Natives
17. Intellectuals
18. The corrupts
98. Other

Reporting/Writing tone towards political actors:

0. N/A
1. Deferential (respect towards the story's main political actor and not second sources or counterarguments added)
2. Neutral (at least two opposed voices, sources or arguments, evenly covered)
3. Adversarial (critical tone towards the story's main political actor and not second sources or counterarguments added)
4. N/A

Sources:

0. N/A
1. Central government (president, minister and diplomatic) officials
2. Other government/state, agencies officials (Supercom, Cordicom, IESS, SRI, Central Bank, etc, here)
3. Local/provincial government officials
4. Courts and lawyers (i.e. from judiciary to lawyers, prosecutors, members of courts, TSE included here, CPCCS, etc)
5. Politician right (not pro-government)
6. Politician right (pro-government)
7. Politician left (not pro-government)
8. Politician left (pro-government)
9. Politician indigenous
10. Politicians transversal (independents, not clear origin and self-acclaimed populist, here)
11. Police officers/law enforcement
12. Social movements (leaders or members)
13. Indigenous movement representative or member (not formally politicians)
14. Trade union representative or equivalent
15. Business association representative or member

16. Financial Institutions representatives and experts (bankers, experts from financial institutions, etc)
17. Specific Businesses (representatives or members of)
18. Agriculture/Primary sector business or association (representative)
19. Non-Governmental Organization environmental, health, human rights and other (v.g. Red Cross representative, International Amnesty, World Economic Forum, etc)
20. Non-Governmental Organization economic development (representative)
21. Professionals, Professional Organization representative/member
22. Media/journalism association/institution or NGO's (media issues related) representative/member
23. Media (other media, news media, journalists, press agency as source)
24. Experts/Analysts, academic researchers (non-governmental; it can be public but not linked to government, studies or expert reports included)
25. Educators and academic representatives (Elementary, Middle and High School, Higher Education) for stories regarding education.
26. Government researcher and adviser/expert
27. Celebrities, famous people, politicians' or officials' relatives and assistants
28. Cultural figures (artists, writers, intellectuals, film directors, musicians, etc)
29. Religious leader, organizer, member of a religious association, religious document
30. Activists, protesters (not representing any organization)
31. Other civil society associations/organizations representatives
32. International organization representative (UN, Unasur, Mercosur, CAN, IMF, etc)
33. US government representative, US official and politicians, experts, etc
34. EU government representative, European official and politicians, experts, etc
35. China government representative, Chinese official, etc
36. Latin American governments (specify which one) representatives/officials and others
37. Other foreign government representative/official
38. Ordinary people (in the street, in an event, unknown individuals, etc)
39. Anonymous or unidentified sources

- 40. Public or state-owned companies representatives or members (Public media here)
- 41. Legal documents and other (laws, codes, regulations, census, etc)
- 42. Emergency services (Fire rescue, *protección civil*, etc)
- 43. Polls and surveys data and experts
- 44. Election results
- 45. Military
- 46. Rectification

- 98. Other

Target audience/ Communication style:

Measured mostly according to sources, although coder must use the writing style an intention when there's not a clear target, sources are not available (v.g. opinion pieces) or there's a clear target despite sources ('civic' articles with government sources informing about an accident, a natural hazard, traffic, social services, etc). Informal language would connote a *Popular target*, whereas a formal language an *Elitist target*. *Pluralist/civic target* would be reflected through mixed sources and language, and a civic (pro citizens, pro discussion, pro consumers) content, whereas *Partisan target/style* would be reflected on stories taking a clear stance, totally supporting or criticizing a political actor without any counter-argument or balanced opinions.

0 N/A

1. *Elitist/professional target* (when article uses legal/formal/specialized language and sources (or voices in opinion pieces) come normally from political parties, specific personalities, professional associations, specialized institutions). Formality, specialized discussions, legal issues and institutional language are key.

2. *Popular/populist target* (when article uses informal language and sources come normally from transversal politicians or political speech, unknown individuals, non-specialized, non-professional, non-institutional. 'Human interest' stories could be included here, as well as conflictive/protests stories when the struggle is focused on the people

versus some enemy. Informal language, human interest, a sense of injustice and a populist logic (us versus them) are key.

3. *Pluralist/civic target* (when article uses specialized, political and institutional sources, and/or some legal/professional language, but it also refers to average individuals and represent non-specialized voices, civic associations and alternative organizations. Public interest issues or a problems and solutions/dialogue focus are key.

4. *Partisan/Unbalanced target* (when article clearly focused on attacking or supporting one specific political actor/party/organization/stance without balanced voices and ordinary people voices, or alternative sources. Two distinct camps and the support or rejection of one of them are key. The story should have a clear political parallelism on some political actor; unbalance stance and clear support for one political option is key.

5. *N/A.* This category is for stories that don't fall in any case in any of the former categories. These cases can comprehend unintelligible stories or blatantly erroneous articles with misattributed sources, news without sources and not clear intention, etc. Stories with rectifications or rectifications are coded here, since they target is changed by the regulatory agencies, and the original purpose is amended.

Remarks:

1. Left, right and transversal spectrum:

We code 'right ideological spectrum' as that one which criticizes state intervention in the economy, praises economic liberalism, stands for traditional values (religion, marriage, sexual orientation, order, etc) and focus on the individual and individual rights. We check also political actors associated to the content (v.g. Hugo Chávez's association more likely to be coded as left; Uribe's association, likely to be coded as right)

We code 'left ideological spectrum' as that one which praises state intervention in the economy, distrusts economic liberalism, is open to new cultural values (on religion and about other cultures, on family, sexual orientation, etc) and focus on the collective and collective rights. When actors express a 'center-left' or 'center-right' position we code them as left or right according to views/policies expressed and, if possible, actor's

position in Ecuador's electoral map (center-right would be right, center-left would be left); otherwise, we code those actors as transversal. If many political parties or voices are represented –without a clear dominance by one political party or parties reflecting a consistent ideological position–, we code the story as transversal.

Sometimes the content may be not clear regarding its full adscription to a right or left ideological position (for instance, Rafael Correa praising state intervention but refusing to take measures supporting women rights on abortion, etc; or the story covers a debate where different views are shared); in that case, the coder must chose 'transversal spectrum'. With this, we try to code the content itself, beyond the political actor individual and ideological self-position, which very often contradicts his party's or ideological allies' values. This difference intends to detect populist messages/discourses, which, according to academia, tend to be thin and transversal.

When the story has a sports/competition frame (not issues involved, no clear political parallelism, not stance from reporter's perspective), we code it as transversal.

2. When coding the target audience and communication style, popular/populist and partisan/unbalanced target may be difficult to differentiate. If a set of sources is not available (a common case in Opinion pieces) we focus on style, the existence of political parallelism and the presence of key terms (for people and for enemy of the people) to decide. For instance, if the story shows key terms and the style is not very technical (not many formal expressions, legal references, etc) we code it as popular/populist. If the story does show some key terms (an enemy for nation, for instance) but the style is very technical and there's a rejection of a political position (v.g. a rejection of Correa's presidency or regime), we may code it as partisan.

With that difference (popular/populist versus partisan) we want to explore the 'transversal' nature of populism, where the call for the people may go through established party lines, in contrast with more specialized and partisan positions related to specific and established party lines.

A story can have a popular/populist target just drawing from ordinary people voices and alternative organizations. Key populist terms (terms for the people and for the people's

enemy) can be absent; in that case the story (v.g. a 'human interest' article) would be more a popular article than a 'populist' story.

2.- Coding sheet:

Case ID _____ Coder _____
 ____000____

Title _ XXXX _____ Paper _ XXXX ____

Day of the week ____ Month ____ Day ____ Year ____

Size _____ Photo _____ Type/Genre _____ Location _____

Subjects _____ Origin of Story ____

Politics Framingⁱ:

_____ Most dominant _____ Less dominant _____

Dominant political actors:

Leader/politician Party d.____ Social mov* Government (all Other: N/A____
 dominant ____ d.____ levels) ____ ____

Ideological spectrumⁱⁱ: Left-focused____ Right focused____ Transversal ____ N/A____

Political parallelismⁱⁱⁱ: Negative____ Positive____ N/A____

People framing^{iv} _____ **"Enemy" of people reference:** 1. By Source:____ 2. By reporter/author: _____

Tone: Deferential____ Adversarial____ Neutral____ N/A____

Sources:
Communication target/style (according to 1.- Sources, and 2.- Language/Speech style):
Elitist/Professional ____ Popular/populist ____ Pluralist/Civic ____ Partisan ____ N/A____
Remarks: ____

ⁱ Select among options (*can be more than one*), when it is plausible and there's more than one possible framing, code which one is more dominant, and which one is less dominant.

ⁱⁱ Always pick transversal when story is about Politics but it doesn't make explicit mentions to left or right policies or cover a specific non-transversal political actor; *choose N/A only when the story is not about*

ⁱⁱⁱ Select among possible options for negative or positive. If it is not clear, just select N/A.

^{iv} More than one option is possible or combination of positive or negative connotation plus one or two associations.

*For social movements, coding includes *ad hoc* movements (not associations or institutionalized NGOs) and labor, gender/LGBT or indigenous social movements (even if institutionalized)

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