Changing Times, Changing Journalism

A content analysis of journalistic role performances in a transitional democracy

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CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING JOURNALISM. A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISTIC ROLE PERFORMANCES IN A TRANSITIONAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract:
Although the democratic role of journalism in new democracies is heavily debated, systematic empirical analysis is scarce. This article studies how the performance of the watchdog and civic journalism role in Chilean newspapers developed during 22 years of democratic transition. We challenge the homogenization-thesis which has often dominated thinking about the role of the media in democratic transition, assuming an automatic uni-directional trend towards more critical professionalism, where reporters increasingly act as watchdogs by taking the side of ordinary citizens against political and economic elite. We argue that a rise in critical professionalism is often limited to a brief honeymoon period after the return to democracy. We furthermore argue that to understand changing role performance during democratic transition one needs to look at specific developments of the media (press freedom, journalism education, advertisement income and circulation) and developments in the political context, in particular the degree of political conflict. These hypotheses are tested with a unique dataset consisting of a content analysis of 20,201 news articles, which make up representative yearly samples of newspaper coverage in Chile between 1990 and 2011. We find no trend towards more watchdog and civic journalism, and limited influences of developments of the media. At least for the performance of these two journalistic roles in Chile, changes in journalism during democratic transition can best be explained by the honeymoon-hypothesis and the degree of political conflict. The generalizability of these findings to other transitional democracies is discussed.
Keywords: journalism, journalistic role performance, political conflict, transitional democracies, homogenization, content analysis

Short biography:

**Claudia Mellado** is Professor in the School of Journalism at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile. She has been visiting professor in different universities in Latin America and Europe. Her research focuses on the study of journalism cultures, journalistic performance, and comparative studies.

**Arjen Van Dalen** is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark. He wrote his PhD dissertation on Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective. His research interests are in comparative communication research, in particular the relations between journalists and politicians, as well as economic news. He has published about these topics in journals such as *Political Communication*, *Journalism*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 
Abstract:
Although the democratic role of journalism in new democracies is heavily debated, systematic empirical analysis is scarce. This article studies how the performance of the watchdog and civic journalism role in Chilean newspapers developed during 22 years of democratic transition. We challenge the homogenization thesis, which has often dominated thinking about the role of the media in democratic transition, assuming an automatic uni-directional trend towards more critical professionalism, where reporters increasingly act as watchdogs by taking the side of ordinary citizens against the political and economic elite. We argue that a rise in critical professionalism is often limited to a brief honeymoon period after the return to democracy. We furthermore argue that to understand changing role performance during democratic transition, one needs to look at specific developments of the media (press freedom, journalism education, advertisement income and circulation) and developments in the political context, in particular the degree of political conflict. These hypotheses are tested with a unique dataset consisting of a content analysis of 20,201 news articles, which make up representative yearly samples of newspaper coverage in Chile between 1990 and 2011. We find no trend towards more watchdog and civic journalism, and limited influences of developments of the media. At least for the performance of these two journalistic roles in Chile, changes in journalism during democratic transition can best be explained by the honeymoon hypothesis and the degree of political conflict. The generalizability of these findings to other transitional democracies is discussed.

Keywords: journalism, journalistic role performance, political conflict, transitional democracies, homogenization, content analysis
Journalism and the democratic process are strongly intertwined (Donsbach and Patterson 2004). Journalism represents a basic strategic resource for the exercise of citizenship as well as the political organization of society (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999). The interrelatedness between journalism and democracy is particularly relevant during democratic transitions (Gunther and Mughan 2000; Voltmer 2006). Not only can the mass media actively contribute to democratic change, these periods are also often accompanied by changes in journalism itself. Consequently, the role of journalism in democratic transition is heavily debated (e.g. Hallin and Mancini 2012; Voltmer 2013: 4). A number of studies have analyzed changes in journalists’ normative ideals (role conceptions) during democratic transition (e.g. Barrera and Zugasti 2006; Stępińska and Ossowski 2012). However, besides several notable exceptions, we still lack systematic analyses about how journalistic ideals materialize in news content (role performance) (Mellado 2015; Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017) and how these practices change in times of democratic transition. Curry (2007:142) correctly emphasizes that “ironically, the mass media have largely been the forgotten institution in studies of the transition (…). Little work has been done looking at the transformation of the media itself or the role of the media in the transition processes.”

Therefore, this article studies how the performance of different journalistic roles changes during democratic transition, and what explains this change. We focus our analysis on the watchdog role and the civic role.

One key aspect of the debate about the role of journalism in transitional democracies is the homogenization thesis (see Lauk 2009: 69), according to which the differences between media systems will decline over time, and journalistic practices will converge towards a model of critical professionalism, where reporters take the side of ordinary citizens against political and economic elite. The homogenization thesis has been heavily debated; especially its applicability beyond Western
contexts is contested (Hallin and Mancini 2012; Voltmer 2013; Waisbord 2012). Nevertheless, we still lack systematic tests of this hypothesis, which requires analyzing journalistic role performance during several years of democratic transition. In this article, we challenge the homogenization thesis and argue that a surge in critical professionalism is often limited to an initial “honeymoon” period after the return to democracy. To understand changing role performance during democratic transition, we look at media-centric explanations (the rise of press freedom, journalism education, advertisement income and circulation) and development in the political context, in particular the degree of political conflict.

These expectations are tested with a unique dataset consisting of a content analysis of over 20,000 Chilean newspaper articles. Specifically, this article analyzes changes in journalistic role performance during 22 years of democratic transition since 1990, when democracy in Chile was restored after the military dictatorship of Pinochet. The results show no trend towards more watchdog and civic journalism, and limited influences of developments of the media. According to the data, changes in journalism can best be explained by the honeymoon hypothesis and the degree of political conflict. The generalizability of these findings to other transitional democracies is discussed.

**Democracy, media and the transition paradigm**

During democratic transition, two journalistic roles are particularly important to perform in order to best support the establishment of a new democracy. First, journalists are expected to fulfill a role as watchdog (Voltmer 2013: 26; Norris and Ologbemi 2009: 16) by taking a critical stance towards those in power and holding them accountable by giving attention to wrongdoings. By fulfilling the watchdog role, journalism acts as a fourth estate and is part of the system of checks and balances, which is an essential aspect of democratic societies. Second, journalists are expected to fulfil a civic role, where they educate the common citizen on complex and controversial topics, and encourage people to get
involved in public debate and participate in political events (Voltmer 2013: 26). When journalists fulfill this role, they assist the democratic transition by reinstating a sense of democratic citizenship among the population and by empowering civil society. Civil society can play a positive role in the establishment and consolidation of new democracies (Bresnahan 2003).

Early thinking about journalistic roles during democratic transition was often based on the idea that journalists and the media would automatically fulfill these roles as they become free from authoritarian rule (see Lauk 2009; and Voltmer 2013). At the normative level, there is indeed support for the idea that the watchdog and civic role are often accepted (Donsbach 2010; Mancini 2000). In their comparative studies on role conceptions of journalists, Weaver and Willnat (2012) as well as Hanitzsch et al. (2011) have found, for example, that journalists around the world tend to agree with Anglo-American journalistic values like neutrality and adversarialism, although different journalistic cultures have specific characteristics. Likewise, an important body of research had provided evidence of a trend towards the globalization of journalistic values and roles (Berglez and Van Leuven 2016; Reese 2010). The idea that differences between journalistic cultures diminish over time as the media adapt to the liberal media system, for example by become increasingly critical of those in power, is the essence of the homogenization (or convergence) thesis that has been extensively discussed in relation to Hallin and Mancini’s three Western media systems. In the conclusion of their book, Hallin and Mancini (2004: 305) tentatively argue that this pattern of homogenization might apply to other systems as well, “because its global influence has been so great and because neoliberalism and globalization continue to diffuse liberal media structures and ideas.” In their discussion of the homogenization thesis, Hallin and Mancini add that there are also important countertendencies to this process and that cultural and structural characteristics of media systems may limit the spread of the Anglo-American model. However, these reservations were often left out in early optimistic thinking about the role of journalism.
and the media in transitional democracies. For example, in her analysis of media in Eastern Europe, Lauk (2009: 69) observes that “it was largely assumed that the newly free media in democratizing societies would naturally follow the path of the ‘liberal’ model of journalism”.

This line of thinking shows resemblance to discussions about the spread of democracy, where “terms ‘democratization’ and ‘transition’ implicitly carry the assumption of a unidirectional process towards liberal democracy” (Voltmer 2012: 233). This is the essence of the transition paradigm, which once dominated thinking about democratic transition in new democracies in Southern Europe and Latin America and later Eastern Europe (the so-called third wave of democracy) (e.g. O’Donell et al. 1986; Huntington 1991). According to this paradigm, “any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition to democracy” (Carothers 2002: 6). The paradigm assumes that although democratic transition may not always move steadily, it is a kind of natural process that countries become increasingly democratic. The paradigm also assumes that this process is universal and country-specific factors like the historical background or political culture have little impact on the transition process (Markwick 1996; Carothers 2002).

**Challenging the transition paradigm**

Over time, the transition paradigm has been challenged, as it became apparent that far from all the post-authoritarian countries made democratic progress. More often than not, democratic progress was limited to an early honeymoon period, “directly following the foundation of democracies when they are less likely to break down” (Bernhard et al. 2003: 406). Political trust, for example, tends to increase during the honeymoon period right after democratic transition, but often declines sharply again in the post-honeymoon period (Catterberg and Moreno 2006). After high political participation, right after the return to democracy, Inglehart and Catterberg (2002: 303) observed a decline in direct political action
in transitional democracies, since the “immediate need for participation recedes and the euphoria of
democratization wears off”. These and other empirical findings challenged the transition paradigm.
More attention is now given to the individual trajectories of different transitional democracies,
depending on the specific backgrounds and characteristics of each individual country (Carothers 2002).

Likewise, an increasing number of scholarly work has challenged the idea of a uniform, one-
directional adaptation of a global journalism model in all new democracies (Hallin and Mancini 2012;
Preston 2009; Waisbord 2012), especially as researchers increasingly focus on journalistic content
rather than ideals and values. The study of professional roles in transitional democracies has shown the
continuing tension between normative values, professional standards and actual reporting practices
(Mwesige 2004; Tong and Sparks 2009). Mellado and Van Dalen (2014) studied the relation between
professional ideals and actual reporting of Chilean journalists and found a significant gap, particularly
for the civic and watchdog roles. Hellmueller and Mellado (2016) compared the presence of the
watchdog role in Chile and the U.S., finding different professional performances of this role in the two
media systems. In the U.S., the watchdog role was strongly connected to political and government
sources, whereas in Chile, the watchdog role was significantly less performed in the news and showed
weaker ties to political sources. Several authors note how post-communist media did not evolve into a
new journalism model, but currently encapsulate a mixture of new and already known journalistic
ideals and roles (Coman 2000).

Empirical analyses that do show a change in journalistic values and practice in transitional
democracies often deal with the early years of transition. Barrera and Zugasti (2006: 40) showed that
during the first years of the Spanish democratic transition, Spanish journalists overall supported
democratic values. Some media even “became the critical conscience of the democratic reform.”
Surveys among journalists in Poland and Spain also showed that the generations of journalists who
were active during the transition period aimed to support democratic ideals in their journalism. A survey conducted three years after the fall of the communist regime showed that Polish journalists valued to criticize and monitor power to almost the same degree as their American colleagues (Oledzki 1998: 290). In 2009 the generation of Polish journalists who were active during this transition still kept a strong professional identity, perceiving “itself to be a watchdog, constantly skeptical of the public officials’ actions and investigating government’s claims” (Sędzińska and Ossowski 2012: 10). This identity seems to reflect their experience of working in and contributing to the times of political change. These values were a lot less important for journalists who entered the profession after the transition. Similar differences were found in Spain, between the older generation of journalists who actively opposed Franco and a newer generation of journalists less concerned with the political role of the press (Canel and Piqué 1998).

From the criticism of the transition paradigm in political science and the empirical findings on the adaptation of journalistic roles in transitional democracies, we can take away the following points, which should inform a more thorough understanding of changing journalism in transitional democracies. First, apart from a possible increase during an early honeymoon period, the development of journalism is not necessarily a unidirectional process where the watchdog and civic role become increasingly present. Second, the adaptation of new journalistic roles will depend on the historical backgrounds and specific characteristics of the transition. Third, the adaptation of new journalistic roles is not a natural, automatic process: to understand how the presence of journalistic roles shifts over time, we need to look at specific developments, which might explain why the presence of the watchdog and civic roles increases at certain times, and decreases again at other times. In the next section, we discuss media-centric and political context explanations for the shifting presence of watchdog and civic role performance during transition.
Media-centric and political context explanations

A first set of possible explanations for shifting journalistic roles in transitional democracies can be found in the conditions under which journalists do their work. First, the degree of press freedom is expected to influence the presence of journalistic roles in news content. Press freedom is an important pre-condition for critical watchdog journalism (Hanitzsch 2011). At the same time, low levels of press freedom will likely lead to journalists taking the side of the elites, rather than performing a civic role and emancipating the audience. Second, we expect that increased levels of journalism education will have an influence of the journalistic role performance in transitional democracies. As journalism education around the world is often inspired by American curricula, journalism students frequently adapt a sense of critical professionalism (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Djerf-Pierre (2000: 254) argues that the critical professionalism has risen in Sweden due to the “academization” of journalism. This becomes apparent in a more critical stand towards authorities and increasing tendencies of journalists to “equip their audiences for active citizenship and democratic participation.” Following this argument, it could be expected that also in transitional democracies, the watchdog and civic journalism roles become more present as more journalists receive academic training. Third, the economic position of the media is expected to influence journalistic role performance. More income from advertisement and from higher circulation numbers can free resources for journalists to write background stories and do investigative reporting. If resources are lacking, the journalists have to rely more on descriptive factual reporting using official sources. Also in transitional democracies, a stronger financial position should make the media less dependent on the state (Voltmer 2013: 167). Thus, we expected that the watchdog and civic journalism roles become more present when the media generate more income, and that these roles are performed less when their economic situation becomes worse.
Next to the media-centric explanations, the political context is also likely to affect journalistic role performance during democratic transition. We expect the degree of political conflict to be an important driver of changes in the presence of the watchdog and civic journalism roles. Cross-nationally, criticism of governments in the news and attention to extra-parliamentary opposition is lower in two-party democracies than in multiparty systems (Sheafer and Wolfsfeld 2009; Van Dalen 2012). According to the indexing thesis (Bennett 1990) and the spheres-of-consensus model (Hallin 1984), the degree of contestation and criticism in news coverage mirrors the level of disagreement and debate among political elites, due to journalistic routines such as the reliance on official sources. Similarly, the degree of political conflict might account for changes in the two journalistic roles in times of transition. When there is conflict between political actors, the media also feature more criticism and views opposing the government. When there is broad consensus, these critical voices will be largely absent from the news. The attention to critical voices is not limited to attention to political elites, since the gates also open for civic opposition voices when political debate is more conflictive (Van Dalen 2012).

Political conflicts are likely to occur during democratic transition, for example in Latin American countries, which according to Zinecker (2009) combines characteristics of ‘soft’ authoritarianism with ‘not-yet-there’ democracies constructed on the grounds of weak political institutions. This could lead to disagreement within the representative institutions, such as between the political left and the political right, or between parties advocating a more progressive transition and parties wanting to maintain the status quo. Such conflicts might spill over into the press. Outside the political institutions, social movements and civic protests may be a second source of political conflict.

Hypotheses
Based on the preceding discussion, we formulate the following hypotheses.

\textbf{H1:} The presence of the watchdog role (H1a) and civic role (H1b) in news content declines after the initial honeymoon period.

\textbf{H2:} The presence of the watchdog role (H2a) and civic role (H2b) in news content reflects the degree of press freedom.

\textbf{H3:} The presence of the watchdog role (H3a) and civic role (H3b) in news content reflects the spread of journalism education.

\textbf{H4:} The presence of the watchdog role (H4a) and civic role (H4b) in news content is positively related to advertising income and circulation of the press.

\textbf{H5:} The presence of the watchdog role (H5a) and civic role (H5b) in news content reflects the degree of political conflict.

\textbf{Method}

We test our hypotheses with a unique content analysis of representative yearly samples of newspaper coverage in Chile from 1990 until 2011. These continuous longitudinal data provide a better basis to study trends than a comparison of a limited number of time points. With our study we answer to a call by Stanyer and Mihelj (2016: 266) who argue that “the field needs to engage more completely with the challenges of researching change over time, and ground the theorizing of change more firmly in empirical research.”
Case selection and sampling

Chile offers an interesting case to study the performance of journalism throughout one particular democratic transition. The country has been labeled a “social laboratory” where a profound neoliberal economic transformation was carried out between 1973 and 2003 - that means that Chile already had a liberal economic system implemented during the dictatorship - marking a radical change in Chilean society. In this context, the media played an important role by conveying a storyline of political cohesion, stability and consensus between the political and economic elites.

The post-1989 period was noted for its peaceful transition and economic growth, but criticized for its restrictions on political competition and expressions of participation. This pattern is not accidental, as it was introduced during the dictatorship, inheriting a fear of instability, a political culture dominated by the interests of a reduced social elite, and a structurally biased electoral system (Teichman 2011). The political violence of the Pinochet regime deactivated a “hypermobilized” society, eradicating trade unions and political organizations, and dismantling collective action structures, in benefit of economic and financial groups closely linked to the dictatorship. The democratic governments that succeeded Pinochet’s military regime based the transition’s success on a process that prioritized economic growth and a high degree of consensus through the “policy of agreements” among the economic and political elite. Macroeconomic developments fostered social peace, but as time passed, new cultural transformations and expectations had to be addressed, with citizens starting to demand more equality and a more egalitarian distribution of income. Riots in the street revived fears among the elite, spurring on visions of the return of collective actions (Teichman 2011), as they increased in number and in demonstrators. Today, the Chilean political process shows signs of fatigue, with a citizenry that has become alienated from politics, disappointed by recent scandals affecting politicians and their campaign finances.
Two newspapers were included in our analysis: Las Últimas Noticias, which belongs to the popular press, and La Tercera, which is a liberal/center-right quality newspaper. We analyze both newspapers in combination. These two newspapers were chosen since they have national circulation, they represent the two major conglomerates that own 90% of the print press in Chile (Las Últimas Noticias belongs to El Mercurio and La Tercera to Copesa), they are among the largest circulation newspapers, they have different audience orientation. Although television and online media have become the most consumed media by the public, the print press is still considered an agenda setter in the national media system.

We analyzed 11,055 articles, which were published in La Tercera and 9,146 articles that appeared in Las Últimas Noticias. These articles were selected in two steps. First, we used the constructed week method to select days, which represent two constructed weeks per newspaper per year. Second, for each of the selected days, we analyzed all the news stories that were published in the following sections: politics, economy and business, police, crime and judicial, social affairs, and general national news. This means that not only stories dealing with politics are included in our analysis, but also other types of news stories, which can be expected to contribute to democratic citizenship in the broadest sense (Mellado and Van Dalen 2016).

Operationalization of journalistic roles

Each of these articles was coded for the presence of indicators of the watchdog and civic roles (Mellado 2015; Mellado and Van Dalen 2014). Given that roles are situational and that specific indicators - which reflect these roles in news - may vary over time, it was not possible to combine the various indicators into scales that were reliable for each of the 22 years in the analysis. Therefore, we
analyze each indicator separately. For both journalistic roles, we analyzed more than one indicator. From a broader set of indicators (See Mellado and Van Dalen 2014), we are selecting the indicators with most variance that were present in at least four percent of all the articles in each of the newspapers over the entire period of analysis.

For watchdog journalism, three indicators matched these criteria. Sources questioning de facto powers, coded as present when individuals or groups of power are questioned through quotes, statements and/or opinions given by someone other than the journalist; Sources criticizing and judging de facto powers, coded as present when individuals or groups of power are criticized in an article in the form of quotes, statements and/or negative opinions given by someone other than the journalist; and Information on judgments, this indicator is coded as present when the news story includes information on judicial or administrative processes against individuals or groups of power.

We analyzed three indicators of the civic journalism: Local impact, which is present when the news story mentions the impact of certain political decisions on specific communities; Citizen perspective, meaning that the news story includes the vision of regular or organized citizens, showing how they perceive or are affected by different political decisions; and Background information, which is present when the news story provides the citizens with background information in order to make political decisions. In addition, we look at the presence of civil society members and ordinary citizens as sources.

Coding was done by native speakers, who received extensive training in the use of the codebook before starting coding and were closely monitored. Intercoder reliability tests showed satisfactory results, as the Krippendorf’s alpha score was between .72 for background information and .85 for citizen perspectives.\(^5\)
Analytical strategy

Before testing our hypotheses, we first check whether there are trends in the yearly presence of each indicator of the two journalistic models. If the presence of the journalistic models shows no upwards trend, this is evidence against the homogenization thesis. We tested for time trends in three ways. We conducted ADF and KPSS tests to find out whether the time series were stationary. Since we only have 22 time points, we used 0.1 as a cutoff point to determine whether the data were stationary or not, rather than the conventional 0.05. In addition, we calculated Pearson’s correlations between the year and the presence of each indicator.

To test whether there was a honeymoon period in Chilean journalism right after the return to democracy (H1a and H1b), we compare the presence of the watchdog and civic role between 1990 and 1993 with the presence during the other years. The 1990-1993 period was chosen since these years coincide with the presidency of Patricio Aylwin, who had won the first democratic elections in 1989.

We conducted granger causality tests to examine whether the yearly developments in role performance reflect yearly developments in press freedom, journalism education, advertisement income and circulation. Since we only have 22 time points for our analyses, we conducted granger causality tests for each of the independent variables separately. By employing simple bivariate Granger models, we test whether the time series of the journalistic roles can be better explained when we take into account lags of the proposed independent variables, than when we only take lags of the journalistic roles into account (Granger 1969). If the Granger test shows that this is the case, we can conclude that looking at the independent variables helps to predict developments in the journalistic models. Even though we have a theoretical argument to explain this, it has to be remembered that this does not necessarily mean that there is true causality, since third variables are not controlled for. Still, the granger causality test can be used to falsify our hypotheses. The degree of press freedom was
operationalized as the freedom of the press score by Freedom House.\textsuperscript{7} As indicator of the degree of journalism education, we used the yearly number of students who are enrolled in journalistic education. The minister of education provided us with these numbers.\textsuperscript{8} Advertisement income was operationalized as the annual advertising investment in annual newspapers collected by WAN/Megatime/ACHAP. Circulation was operationalized as the number of (paid and free) daily newspapers per 1 million inhabitants.\textsuperscript{9}

To test the influence of political conflict, we compare the presence of journalistic roles in the news during different presidencies. The president plays a dominant role in the Chilean political system, which is characterized by exaggerated presidentialism (Fuentes 2015: 102). If the political conflict-hypothesis is correct, the watchdog and civic role should be more present during presidencies which are characterized by more political contestation than during presidencies which are more consensual. Until 2010, the president belonged to the center-left Concertation coalition, which also had the majority in the Chamber of Deputies (Fuentes 2015). After 2010, when right-leaning President Piñera was elected, the right-leaning coalition also dominated the Chamber of Deputies. In other words, there was limited conflict between the executive and the legislative. Conflict came more from the external environment. As an indicator of the level of conflict, we look at the average score for the World Bank’s ‘Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism’ during the different Presidencies.\textsuperscript{10} After a period of relative tranquility during the first presidency, the arrest of Pinochet in 1998 during the presidency of Frei leads to considerable debate and demonstrations. At the same time, unemployment rose, and government approval dropped. During this period, political stability was at its lowest (0.31). In 2000, President Lagos took office, and after a difficult start - due the economic situation and corruption, his presidency was characterized by higher levels of political stability (0.71) than the preceding and following presidencies. Starting in 2006 during the presidency of Bachelet, students, teachers, public
transportation users, indigenous people and environmentalists intensified countless demonstrations reflecting the new protagonism of civic life, along with a gradual empowerment of citizens and an increase in participation (Teichman 2011). This led to a decrease in political stability (0.50). If the political conflict hypothesis is correct, the watchdog and civic journalism model should be more present during the presidencies of Frei and Bachelet than during the presidency of Lagos.

Results

Watchdog journalism

Figure 1 shows how the presence of three indicators of the journalistic watchdog role developed between 1990 and 2011. The three indicators show parallel developments. The ADF test, the KPSS test, and Pearson’s correlation all show that there is no trends in the data (Table 1). Thus, during the 22 years of transition, the watchdog journalism model did not become more present in Chilean newspapers.

The data show partial support for hypothesis 1a. There are significantly more articles in which sources question de facto power during the honeymoon period (6.9% of the articles) than during the following presidencies (5.4%; $\chi^2=15,320$, df=1, p<.05). The same goes for sources criticizing de facto power, which were present in 8.3% of the articles during the honeymoon period, compared to 5.9% during the four later presidencies ($\chi^2=33,448$, df=1, p<.001). There is no honeymoon effect for information on judgements. The number of articles in which sources question or criticize de facto powers already starts to decline in 1990.

Table 2 reports $p$ values for the F tests which were done to test whether developments in press freedom (H2a), journalism education (H3a), advertising revenues, and circulation (H4a) granger cause the presence of the watchdog role in the news. Press freedom was the only media context variable that
had a significant effect. An increase in press freedom precedes an increase of sources questioning de facto powers. We conclude that Hypothesis 2a is partially supported, while Hypotheses 3a and 4a are not.

In line with the political conflict hypothesis, there were less sources questioning de facto powers during the Lagos presidency (4.7%) than during the preceding (5.9%; $\chi^2 = 7,827$, df=1, $p<.01$) and following presidency (5.9%; $\chi^2 = 4,616$, df=1, $p<.05$). In the newspaper La Tercera, sources criticizing de facto powers followed the same pattern. However, this was not the case for Las Últimas Noticias. The relation between political conflict and the watchdog model was confirmed in a further analysis, which showed that the yearly presence of sources criticizing and questioning de facto powers was negatively and significantly correlated with the world bank’s annual ‘Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism’ score ($r=-.57$, $p<.05$ and $r=-.54$, $p<.05$, respectively). Contrary to the political conflict hypothesis however, attention to information on judgements was not significantly lower during the Lagos presidency than before and after when there was more political conflict. We conclude that hypothesis 5a is partially supported.

Civic journalism

Figure 2 shows the development of three indicators of the civic journalistic role in the Chilean press, while Figure 3 shows the presence of civic and citizen sources. As with watchdog journalism, there is no upward trend in the presence of the indicators of the civic model in Chilean newspapers. The KPSS
test and correlation with time suggest that the presence of civil society sources declines rather than increases (See Table 3). The only indicator that shows a significant upward trend is the presence of citizen sources, which increased from a presence in 11.6% of the articles when Aylwin was president to 17.3% during Bachelet’s presidency.

The citizen perspective was significantly more present during the first presidential period (7.3%) than during the other presidencies combined (5.7%; $\chi^2 = 15,905$, df=1, $p<.001$). Likewise the presence of civic sources decreased significantly after the honeymoon period from 13.6% to 12.7% ($\chi^2 = 27,911$, df=1, $p<.001$). Contrary to the honeymoon hypothesis, however, there is no significant drop in the attention for local impact. The attention for contextual information and citizen sources was lower right after the start of the democratic transition period than in later years. Thus, hypothesis 1b is supported for the citizen perspective and civic sources only. These indicators of the civic role were mainly present in the first two years after democracy was reinstalled.

-Table 3, Table 4 and Figures 2 and 3 about here-

Neither press freedom, journalism education, advertisement spending, nor newspaper circulation granger caused the presence of the civil roles in Chilean news (Table 4). From this we conclude that the presence of the civic journalism role in Chilean newspapers is not affected by media developments. We find some support for the hypothesis that the degree of political conflict matters. Contextual information is significantly more present during the second (11.2%) and fourth presidency (13.0%) than during the Lagos presidency (7.9%; respectively $\chi^2 = 4,874$, df=1, $p<.001$ and $\chi^2 = 52,118$, df=1, $p<.001$). For the citizen perspective and local impact, we do not see this pattern. The relation between political conflict and the civic model was confirmed in further analysis, which showed that the yearly
presence of both contextual information and citizen perspective were negatively and significantly correlated with the world bank’s annual ‘Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism’-indicator (r=-.47, p<.05 and r=-.49, p<.05). The presence of civic society sources and citizens does not fluctuate depending on the different presidential periods, but instead shows a steady decline and a steady upwards trend, respectively. In sum, the political conflict hypothesis (H5b) is partially supported.

Discussion

In this article we contribute to the debate about journalism in transitional democracies by analyzing the Chilean press during the first 22 years after the return to democracy in 1989. We discuss the generalizability of the findings in the light of two particularities of the Chilean transition: the high levels of consensus among political elites during the transition, and the neoliberal legacy of the previous regime.

Challenging the homogenization thesis, we found that during the 22 years of democratic transition, there was no increase in the presence of watchdog or civic journalism roles. The only content characteristic that showed an upwards trend in both newspapers was the presence of ordinary citizens as sources. However, since this increase is not accompanied by an increase in a civic perspective in the news, these ordinary citizens are more likely to be portrayed as a passive public, rather than an engaged citizenry (Lewis et al. 2004). The increase of citizens as sources seems more a sign of a commercial logic, rather than a growth of critical professionalism (Hallin and Mancini 2004:278), something that future studies should address.
We found partial support for the honeymoon hypothesis. As expected, post-honeymoon, there was a drop in sources questioning or criticizing de facto power, in the citizen perspective and in the presence of civic sources. However, differences were not large. This might be the results of the limbo that journalists are in during these first years of democratic transition. On the one hand, they have more freedom to give room to critical voices than during authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, they might feel a kind of loyalty to the new government and the new political situation, which could make them hesitant to rock the boat by being critical adversaries of the new political elites (Harber 2004). In the Chilean case, specifically, the establishment of a “policy of agreements” among political actors that ensured the status quo for the first years of democracy after Pinochet could be part of the explanation of this result.

The explanatory analysis showed that developments of the media had limited influence on the role performance in Chile. We have to be careful when generalizing the lack of influence for the commercial factors (advertising income and circulation) to other transitional democracies. The Chilean media were already neoliberal before the return to democracy, and commercialization already characterized its media system. These results might be different in other democratic transitions, such as post-communist countries, where the media did not follow a neoliberal logic before the return to democracy. We conclude that media-related factors have limited influence, especially when compared to the influence of the political context. The finding that the only media-related variable in which granger causes the watchdog role was press freedom, which is related to the political context in which the media operate, speaks for this.

We also found partial support for the political conflict hypothesis. At the end of Frei’s presidency and during Bachelet’s presidency, the news featured more criticism and more civic journalism, in particular more contextual information. During the Lagos presidency, which came in
between, this type of journalism was significantly less present. The influence of political conflict on journalistic roles in the news also becomes clear from the indicators of watchdog journalism, which were identified in the content analysis. As described in the methods section, there were only very few instances where journalists themselves criticized or questioned powerholders (less than four per cent). When critical journalism was present, this was almost always presented through critical sources. This underlines how dependent critical journalism is on conflict and contestation in the political realm. Due to the high degree of political consensus during the Chilean transition and the low degree of polarization between the executive and the legislative, we could not test the relation between conflicts between political elites on the presence of the watchdog and civic journalism roles. Instead, we operationalized political conflict mainly by looking at the presence of protests and demonstrations. We hypothesize that in transitional democracies with more conflict between political elites there should be an even stronger relation between political conflict and journalistic roles. Due to the legacy of the previous regime, the Chilean media market “still tends to be homogenous in its ideological and cultural leaning” (Navia and Osorio 2015: 471). It can be expected that in transitional democracies with a more polarized press, political conflicts will also be more present in the newspapers and lead to more attention for critical sources.

When interpreting these results, a number of caveats have to be taken into account, which call for future research. Due to the large time span of our content analysis, we had to limit the number of media outlets that we analyzed to two newspapers, excluding other types of media platforms. Since different media platforms may have different role performances (Reich, 2016), we believe that it is important to test the same hypotheses for other media types. Although more than 20,000 articles were content analyzed for our study, the number of years (or time points) in the analysis was still only 22. Furthermore, we started our analysis in the years after the end of the authoritarian regime, so further
studies could analyze countries where democratic transition took place earlier, in order to include more data points in the granger causality tests. Future studies of the honeymoon hypothesis could expand the analysis by analyzing journalistic roles in the last years before democratic transition. In our test of the political context hypothesis, we compared changes in news content from one presidential period to the news, due to the dominance of the president in the Chilean political system. Other periodizations could be explored, since shifts in the presence of the journalistic roles did not completely overlap with changes between presidencies. Qualitative content analyses could also give more in-depth insights on how changes in the political context are reflected in changes in journalistic roles. Ideally, content analyses should be supplemented by other types of research such as the study of professionalization (Waisbord 2013), to better understand role performance and how it develops over time. Another reason for repeating the study in other contexts is the neoliberal legacy of the previous regime and the high degree of consensus that characterize Chilean transition, which may partially explain why we only found partial support for our hypotheses. We expect that the honeymoon hypothesis and political conflict hypotheses will find stronger support in more polarized transitional democracies.
Short biography:

**Claudia Mellado** is a professor at the School of Journalism at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile. She has been visiting professor at different universities in Latin America and Europe. Her research focuses on the study of journalism cultures, journalistic performance, and comparative studies.

**Arjen Van Dalen** is an associate professor at the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark. He wrote his PhD dissertation on Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective. His research interests are in comparative communication research, in particular the relations between journalists and politicians, as well as economic news. He has published about these topics in journals such as *Political Communication, Journalism,* and *Public Opinion Quarterly.*

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**Endnotes**

1 In line with Voltmer (2013: 9), we use the terms democratic transition and transitional democracies to refer to “countries that have turned away from authoritarian forms of government since the onset of the ‘third wave’ in the mid-1970s”.

2 The civic role is not as clearly an element of American journalism as watchdog journalism is. This can, for example, be seen from the presence of civil sources in the news. Hallin and Benson (2007) found less civil society sources in American news than in French news. On the other hand, Ferree (2002) found more civil society sources in the U.S. than in Germany.
3 With a few exceptions, analyses of the two newspapers separately lead to similar conclusions about the hypotheses. The instances where there are differences between the two newspapers are discussed in the text.

4 See Mellado and Van Dalen (2016: 8) for a detailed description of the constructed week sampling method which was applied.

5 See Mellado and Van Dalen (2014; 2016) for more details on the intercoder reliability test and coder training.

6 The number of lags included in each analysis was the minimal number of lags for models without autocorrelation. We used differencing to turn non-stationary time series into stationary ones.

7 Data were downloaded from www.freedomhouse.org and were available from 1993 onwards.

8 The numbers were provided by Servicio de Información de Educación Superior (SIES), del Ministerio de Educación (Mineduc).

9 Data were downloaded from http://www.democracybarometer.org/. The indicator ‘degree of education among the population’ was not available for all the years. When no score was available, we used the score from the previous year.

10 This is one of the Worldwide Governance Indicators collected by the World Bank and measures “perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically motivated violence”. This measure is among others based on the presence of protests, riots, demonstrations, as well as internal and social conflicts (http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/pdf/pv.pdf). The data are available for 12 of the 22 years in our analysis.

11 When the two newspapers were analyzed separately, we found a honeymoon effect for Las Últimas Noticias, but not for La Tercera.
References


Tables and Figures

Table 1: Tests identifying trends in the presence of the watchdog model in the Chilean press 1990-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information on judgements</th>
<th>ADF*</th>
<th>KPSS**</th>
<th>Pearson's correlation***</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources questioning de facto power</td>
<td>-3.41</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.24 n.s.</td>
<td>No trend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources criticizing de facto power</td>
<td>-4.21</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.36 n.s.</td>
<td>No trend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * critical value ADF (10%): -2.58; **critical value KPSS (10%): 0.35. ***correlation with time

Table 2: Granger causality tests of antecedents of the watchdog role in the Chilean press 1990-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information on judgements</th>
<th>Source questioning de facto powers</th>
<th>Source criticizing de facto powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΔPress freedom</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism education</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔPublicity spending</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper circulation</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns contain p-values (two-tailed test)
Table 3: Identifying trends in the presence of the civic journalistic model in the Chilean press

1990-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ADF*</th>
<th>KPSS**</th>
<th>Pearson's correlation***</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen perspective</td>
<td>-3.41</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local impact</td>
<td>-4.79</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual information</td>
<td>-3.90</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society sources</td>
<td>-2.70</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen sources</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * critical value ADF (10%): -2.58; **critical value KPSS (10%): 0.347. ***correlation with time
Table 4: Granger causality tests of antecedents of the civic journalism role in the Chilean press
1990-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citizen perspective</th>
<th>Local impact</th>
<th>Contextual information</th>
<th>ΔCivil society sources</th>
<th>ΔCitizen sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΔPress freedom</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism education</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔPublicity spending</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper circulation</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Columns contain p-values (two-tailed test)*
Figure 1: The presence of three indicators of the watchdog journalistic model in Chilean newspapers between 1990 and 2011

Note: Share of articles in La Tercera and Las Últimas Noticias in which each indicator is present. Three period moving average.
Figure 2: The presence of three indicators of the civic model in Chilean newspapers between 1990 and 2011

Note: Share of articles in La Tercera and Las Últimas Noticias in which each indicator is present. Three period moving average.
Figure 3: The presence of civic society sources and ordinary citizens in Chilean newspapers between 1990 and 2011

Note: Share of articles in La Tercera and Las Últimas Noticias in which each type of sources is present. Three period moving average.