



# Serving Consumers, Citizens, or Elites: Democratic Roles of Journalism in Chilean Newspapers and Television News

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## Abstract

Print journalism has long been seen as a key institution of democratic politics, serving to enhance transparency, provide a forum for debate, and facilitate public participation. Instead, television journalism, particularly in its commercial form, has often been seen more negatively, as a form of infotainment that contributes little to the functions of journalism as an institution of democratic citizenship. Some scholars have questioned the dichotomy between infotainment and democratic roles, however, and the existing research comparing journalistic roles in print and television has produced mixed results. Focusing on the case of Chile and making use of a standardized news content-based index of journalistic roles, this study compares the prevalence of three professional roles by medium—newspapers and television—and also by audience orientation—popular and elite media across both print and television news. Our results show that commercial television in Chile is higher than print media in the performance of the watchdog and civic roles, and the infotainment role is positively, not negatively, correlated with these. We discuss the implication of these findings in light of the literature on infotainment and citizenship, as well as the emerging body of research on journalistic role performance.

## Keywords

Journalistic role performance, journalism, Latin America, television news, print news, democracy

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Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure (1976), in a study carried out in 1972, just a few years after television had eclipsed print as the medium voters relied on most for political journalism in the United States, pointed out that television news frequently placed exciting pictures ahead of informative reporting, often ignoring the substance of politics to concentrate on the trivial, but colorful, campaign shenanigans that provide good film. This view of television news has been expressed extensively and frequently as commercialism has expanded worldwide. It is often connected with critical views of television more widely (e.g., Bourdieu 1998) as representing the domination of commercial logics over cultural production, and is an important component in the literature on the “mediatization” of politics (e.g., Mazzoleni 1995). It is also connected with a wider debate about whether entertainment-related roles of journalism—as Patterson and McClure, and many subsequent writers have argued—tend to undermine the function of the media as an institution of democratic citizenship or, on the contrary, can be combined with or contribute to those roles (Brants 1998; Gripsrud 1992; Langer 1998).

We revisit these questions here using broad set of measures developed within the growing literature on journalistic role performance (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017), applied to samples of print and television news in Chile. We compare the presence of journalistic roles in these two types of medium, examining the potential overlapping of professional roles in practice, the relative influence of media platform and media audience orientation in the presence of different roles in print and TV news, as well as the contribution of different forms of journalism to public debate and democratic politics. We show that, contrary to the expectations and findings of much previous work, television news in Chile often combines consumer orientation with a higher degree of civic and watchdog journalism than its newspaper counterparts. We discuss the implications of our findings, arguing that our standardized content-based methodology for analyzing professional roles in news provides a useful way to advance our understanding of different media’s performance in different contexts.

## **Comparing Print and Television News**

A number of arguments have been put forward over the years why television might differ from print journalism and in particular why television news might privilege infotainment functions of journalism over roles oriented toward democratic citizenship. Television is a visual medium, as Patterson and McClure observed, and pressures toward visualization and personalization (e.g., Graber 1993; Hart 1999; Keeter 1987) might push its agenda away from information and discussion of public affairs. Television’s audience is volatile. Newspapers are often sold by subscription, and it is not necessary for a newspaper to keep the attention of every audience member through every story as it is with television. In television industries, moreover, journalism and news are a small part of the overall content. Journalists are therefore much more marginal in the organizational structure. Television news often has limited space and time to develop stories, though as we shall see this is not always the case.

A significant body of research has compared print and television news. Neuman et al. (1992) were among the first to test the “television hypothesis” according to which television news would lack depth and context and would therefore prove inferior as a source of information about politics. They found that television was indeed higher in personalization and visualization, but not necessarily lower in context, and showed in experimental research that it was in many contexts an effective source of political learning. Bennett (2003) compared political coverage of television with that of print and found that the first emphasizes individual traits, such as a politician’s personality and emotions, over coverage of political developments. Druckman (2005) compared local newspaper and television election coverage in Minnesota. He found more coverage overall and more use of issue frames in newspapers, but no significant difference in personalization or in the use of game frames, which dominated both media. Strömbäck and van Aelst (2010) compared election coverage in Sweden and Belgium across commercial and public TV, and quality and tabloid newspapers. They found that personalization was generally highest in tabloid newspapers and commercial TV, while the results on the use of game frames were more complex. Albaek et al. (2014) also compared print and TV news across Denmark, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, looking at indicators of a “pragmatic” or “sacerdotal” orientation toward politics. While they do not highlight differences between these two types of medium, their data show a complex pattern of difference and similarity. In Spain, for example, newspapers were much higher in attention to political news than television, while in Denmark and Germany this was not the case. Human-interest framing was generally more prevalent in television, but coverage of the private lives of politicians was high only for the case of the commercial TV in Britain.

de Vreese et al. (2017) also have data across these media types for political coverage in fourteen European countries, the United States and Israel. They report that commercial television tends to be more interpretive, more negativistic, and more oriented toward “soft” news. Personalization in coverage of political leaders is related not strictly to the medium but to competition in media markets. Reich (2016), in a study based on interviews and the study of journalistic routines rather than content, compared Israeli journalistic production practices in print, radio, and online media, finding that the most rich reporting patterns were, surprisingly, on television.

Clearly, the issue of print–television differences in journalistic roles is still open, decades after it was first posed. The existing body of research has shown divergent results and is limited in important ways. Many of these studies are highly ambitious, but at the same time, each covers a limited number of variables; they tend to focus either exclusively on election coverage or on political reporting in general, and focus almost exclusively on the United States and Europe.

## **Journalistic Role Performance in News**

Our study analyzes the performance of journalistic roles between television news and the print press, drawing on a set of empirical indicators and a conceptual framework developed around the concept of journalistic role performance, which has gained importance within

the field of journalism studies (Hellmueller et al. 2016; Mellado 2015; Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017; Mellado et al. 2017; Mellado and van Dalen 2017; Tandoc et al. 2013; Wang et al. 2017, among others). This stream of research grew in part out of the insight that survey-based research might not reflect actual manifestation of professional roles in practice (Mellado and van Dalen 2014; Patterson and Donsbach 1996; van Dalen et al. 2017; D. H. Weaver and Wilhoit 1996). Journalistic role performance has been defined as “the collective outcome of concrete newsroom decisions and the style of journalistic reporting, considering different constraints that influence and enable journalism as a professional practice” (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017: 5).

In recent years, scholars have developed a set of standardized content-based measures of professional roles in news (Mellado 2015), looking at three main arenas in which the practice of journalism can be situated: the “journalistic voice” domain—related to the presence or absence of the journalists’ voice in the news; the “power relations” domain—which deals with the relationship of journalism with those in power; and the “audience approach” domain—dealing with the way in which journalism addresses the audience (Donsbach 2008; Eide and Night 1999; Hanitzsch 2007; D. H. Weaver and Wilhoit 1996).

Within each of these domains, professional roles can be measured in news content through indicators related to specific reporting styles. The journalistic voice domain involves the role of the journalist as *disseminator* or *interventionist*. The *watchdog* and the *loyal* roles relate to the power relations domain. Finally, the *civic*, *service*, and *infotainment* roles form part of the audience approach domain. Using these scales, the performance of roles in news has been measured—and the scales have been validated—in different regions and countries across the globe, showing an overall hybridization of journalistic cultures (Mellado et al. 2017; Stepińska et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2017).

## Journalistic Role Performance across Media Platforms

An important limitation of the existing research on journalistic role performance is that it has been mostly focused on the analysis of a single type of medium, particularly the print press, despite the important theoretical discussion about whether journalistic cultures and practices vary across media platforms. Our study explores this variation across television and print. The new theorizing within this emerging research tradition as well as the standard measures developed within it provide, in our view, a broader and more systematic test of claims about print–television differences in the performance, particularly, of democratic roles than is found in most existing studies.

The literature on journalistic role performance suggests reasons, both empirical and theoretical, to question the conventional “television hypothesis,” according to which the entertainment orientation of television news undermines or displaces democratic journalistic roles. That conventional wisdom implies that we can understand a number of journalistic roles as organized in a single dimension, with the infotainment role at one end and roles related to democratic citizenship—the *watchdog* and *civic* roles—at the other. Role performance literature, however, conceives professional roles as independent sets of practices, which can be combined in various ways.

Indeed, role theory (Lynch 2007) as well as studies on journalistic roles have shown that roles are situational and historical, and can mutate and overlap in practice (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017; Vos 2017; D. H. Weaver et al. 2007). They are conceived as being rooted in broad social contexts that include factors such as the political culture of particular media systems, the pattern of relations between journalists and other social actors, the market structure of media industries, and patterns of socialization of journalists. The particular platform or medium might have an influence, but it is also entirely possible that common patterns of role performance characteristics within a particular media system cut across media platforms. Journalistic roles are also conceived as flexible, nonexclusive, and often subject to adaptation and combination. As Mellado and Vos (2017: 107) observe, if “the watchdog role is a truly journalistic role, then it should be capable of being performed regardless of the medium in which journalists do their work.” According to this perspective, roles such as the infotainment could be mixed with traditional democratic roles, regardless of the type of medium.

We measure journalistic roles in two Chilean newspapers and two television stations to test the conventional television hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Television news will show a higher level of the infotainment role and lower levels of the watchdog and civic roles than the print press.

We also test a related hypothesis derived from the literature on infotainment against a counterhypothesis derived from the journalistic role performance literature:

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** The watchdog and civic roles will be negatively correlated with the infotainment role in print and television news.

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** The watchdog, civic, and infotainment roles will vary independently in print and television news.

To this point, we have been treating “television” and “print” as though they were homogeneous categories, but in fact it is clear that they are not. The “television hypothesis” was developed, originally in the United States, to deal specifically with *commercial* television, and television news organizations differ in their funding and governing structures, organizational goals, and audience niches. Newspapers similarly differ substantially, with an important distinction lying between elite or “quality” newspapers and the popular or “tabloid” press. Our research design permits adding the following research question:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** Are democratic roles of journalism shaped more strongly by medium (television/print) or by media audience orientation (elite/popular)?

## The Chilean Case

Historically, the Chilean press was highly diverse and politicized, with a large number of newspapers representing different ideological and partisan tendencies, resembling

the Polarized Pluralist model Hallin and Mancini (2004) found in the countries of Southern Europe. During the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), political pluralism was suppressed and control of the press became highly concentrated, with two private companies closely tied to political and economic elites dominating the market. Since the restoration of democracy, Chile is considered to have a high level of press freedom compared with other Latin American countries. Many of the kinds of political interventions that limit press freedom in other parts of the continent, including violence against journalists, judicial repression, bribery, and political manipulation of government advertising, are largely absent. However, as in many countries in the region, a high level of media concentration remains, especially in the print press, with two conglomerates, *El Mercurio* and *Copesa*, controlling about 90 percent of the newspaper circulation. At the national level, each has one elite daily newspaper and one popular daily newspaper.

Chilean television channels were owned in the early years by universities. They were supported by advertising and combined the logic of commercial television with elements of a public service orientation. CNTV, which regulates the government-owned channel *Televisión Nacional de Chile* (TVN), was established under the left-wing Allende government in 1969. All four were controlled politically by the government during the Pinochet dictatorship, and the university stations were eventually privatized. TVN is a hybrid entity, totally supported by advertising and thus private in its financing, but publicly owned and run by a board appointed by the President and Senate and including representatives of the employees (Fuenzalida 2002; Ortega 2008). It is relatively autonomous of direct government control and is closer in many ways to a genuine public service broadcaster than similar entities in the rest of Latin America (Arroyo et al. 2012), though its commercial funding leads to considerable debate about whether it should be considered a real public service broadcaster. It has a 17 percent audience share (CNTV 2016). Its public accountability does mean that it is widely seen as having more of a “sacerdotal” orientation toward public affairs in its news coverage than a private broadcaster. Our data will shed light on the question of how different journalistic roles are performed in Chilean public television compared with the private broadcaster. TVN represents an elite orientation within the television market, in contrast to the privately owned TV network *Chilevisión*.

The Chilean case is unique in many ways, but this is true of any single media system. Some of its most significant characteristics—a post-authoritarian political system, predominantly commercialized media with concentrated ownership, and a dominance of electronic media as a source of information for the audience—are common to many media systems around the world, so important elements of the pattern found here are likely to have parallels in a wide range of other systems. We hope the theoretical and empirical approach developed here will not only be useful in understanding the democratic performance of different media in Chile but will also provide a starting point for using our standardized content-based index of journalistic roles in news to advance our understanding of media practices in different contexts, including the media system types identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) or the post-authoritarian transitional regime types identified by Voltmer (2013)—whether those with a

legacy of military dictatorship like Chile (and Argentina, Brazil, etc.), systems transitioning from a past as communist one-party states (as in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet states), one-party rule in the context of statism (in former “developmental dictatorships” in Asia), or personalized one-party rule in the context of weak state institutions (in parts of Africa).

## **Method**

We conducted a content analysis of two newspapers and two television channels with national reach/circulation, independent of each other in terms of ownership, and among the most popular in their market niches. In the case of print media, we included one newspaper representing the popular press (*Las Últimas Noticias*, belonging to El Mercurio, with about 16 percent of the market; Valida 2016) and another representing the elite press (*La Tercera* belonging to Copesa, with about 20 percent). For television, a channel representative of public TV (TVN) was included, as well as one representing private TV (Chilevisión). The four selected media thus vary separately on two dimensions: medium (TV–print) and audience orientation (elite–popular).

We decided to select one media outlet of each kind because previous studies have shown that media with similar audience orientation tend to be homogeneous in content due to competition (Esser 1999). In Chile, for example, Mellado and Lagos (2014) analyzed the four national newspapers and did not find differences between the two popular or between the two elite newspapers.

## **Sampling**

Using the constructed week method, a stratified-systematic sample was selected for each media outlet from January 2 to December 31, 2015. For each, a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of each semester of the year was randomly selected, ensuring that each month of each year was represented by at least one day, preventing the overrepresentation of a particular period. This means that two weeks were constructed per media outlet, and thus twenty-eight issues of each newspaper and twenty-eight news broadcasts of each television channel were sampled.

The unit of analysis for coding was the news story. Within each sampled issue or broadcast, all news about politics, economy and business, police and crime, courts, defense, health, education, public works, housing, transport, energy and environment, accidents and disasters, religion and churches, human rights, marches and protests, science and technology, and sports, culture, and entertainment were content analyzed. The editorial and opinion columns, weather, horoscope, movie reviews, puzzles, social pages in print media, and similar content on TV were not included, nor were front-page announcements (newspapers), headlines on TV, supplements, magazines, or special features programs. In the case of print media, the regular sections of the newspaper (which appear every day) were analyzed. For television, the main newscast of each media was analyzed. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample per media outlet.

**Table 1.** News Stories Sampled per Medium (N).

<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>Las Ultimas Noticias</i>	TVN	Chilevisión
1,023	710	362	364

Note. TVN = Televisión Nacional de Chile.

## Measurements

This study makes use of a set of indicators that measure journalistic roles in news proposed by Mellado (2015) which have been validated in different cultural settings (Hellmueller et al. 2016; Mellado et al. 2017; Mellado and van Dalen 2017; Wang et al. 2017). This framework includes the operationalization of six professional roles in news: the interventionist, the watchdog, the loyal-facilitator, the infotainment, the service and the civic roles. All six were included in our study, but we focus here on three of these roles according to the hypotheses posed above: the infotainment, watchdog, and civic roles.

The original indicators, designed for the analysis of print media, were adapted considering the special modalities of television, including the audio(visual) resources that this media platform may include besides text—whether written or spoken, for example, sound-based indicators of emotion or sensationalism such as sound manipulation, nonverbal expressions, video motion, image frames, or editing. Images, as well as text, were coded for both print and television.

Table 2 summarizes the specific indicators for the three roles, which are the focus of this article. More information on their operationalization can be found in Mellado (2015) and Mellado and Vos (2017). Each indicator required the coding of manifest content on a presence (1) or absence (0) basis. In the case of some indicators (e.g., criticism by journalists), we also coded for the actor toward which journalistic comment is directed.

Based on the theoretical rationale of the role performance literature (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach 2017), we assumed that journalistic roles can coexist, so these measures are treated as nonexclusive. A number of additional variables measured the topic of the story and the kinds of sources used.

For each professional role, multi-item scales were generated after performing confirmatory factorial analysis within each domain.<sup>1</sup> For descriptive purposes, we calculated the raw scores (sum of points divided by the total of items in each role in a range: 0–1). A higher score thus expressed a higher presence of each journalistic role in the news, and vice versa. Meanwhile, we used factor scores<sup>2</sup> to test for differences in the performance of the analyzed roles.

Coding was carried out by six research assistants following a process of training through pretests. To reduce bias, the body of content was divided randomly among coders. Global intercoder-reliability based on posttests using Krippendorff's alpha (Ka) was .73.

Following the completion of the quantitative analysis, to provide deeper understanding of what were in some ways surprising results, we also carried out an

**Table 2.** Indicators for the Watchdog, Infotainment, and Civic Roles.**Watchdog**

- Reporting on trials and hearings (Ka = .74)
- Questioning on the part of the journalist (Ka = .71)
- Questioning on the part of others (Ka = .72)
- Criticism on the part of journalists (Ka = .70)
- Criticism on the part of others (Ka = .73)
- Charges of wrongdoing expressed by the journalist (Ka = .70)
- Charges of wrongdoing expressed by others (Ka = .72)
- Reporting of external investigations (Ka = .78)
- Reporting of conflict (Ka = .77)
- Investigative reporting (Ka = .75)

**Infotainment**

- Personalization (Ka = .73)
- Focus on private life (Ka = .71)
- Sensationalism (Ka = .80)
- Scandal (Ka = .72)
- Invocation of emotions (Ka = .75)
- Morbidity (Ka = .72)

**Civic**

- Including citizen perspective (Ka = .75)
- Reporting citizen demands (Ka = .73)
- Supporting credibility of citizens (Ka = .73)
- Education on duties and rights (Ka = .72)
- Providing background and context (Ka = .73)
- Reporting on local impact (Ka = .70)

interpretive analysis focusing on the variables most relevant to the democratic roles of journalism. We identified the stories scoring highest on the watchdog and civic roles in each of the four media, looking in detail at the context of the stories, the stances of the journalists, and the ways in which citizens, civil society, and elite actors were portrayed.

## Findings

Table 3 shows the prevalence of the three journalistic roles in the four media sampled. The analysis shows that television is more oriented toward the infotainment role than print, partially supporting H1. It does, however, suggest that TVN, despite its commercial funding structure, is less entertainment-oriented than the privately owned Chilevisión. Consistent with previous studies that show that media with different audience orientation tend to show differences in news content (Esser 1999), we also found significant differences between the elite and the popular press, with the popular newspaper higher in the infotainment role.

**Table 3.** Journalistic Roles by Media Outlet.

Media Outlet	Watchdog	Infotainment	Civic
<i>La Tercera</i>	.06	.11	.06
<i>Las Ultimas Noticias</i>	.03	.25	.05
TVN	.06	.29	.12
Chilevisión	.09	.36	.10

Note. TVN = Televisión Nacional de Chile.

**Table 4.** Correlations (Pearson's *r*) of Journalistic Roles (*N* = 2,459).

Roles	Infotainment	Civic
Watchdog	.127***	.129***
Infotainment		.130***

\*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed test).

When we come to the two journalistic roles most often associated with the contribution of media democratic citizenship, the results are more surprising, at least from the point of view that sees television, with its infotainment orientation, as deficient in contrast to the newspaper. The civic and especially the watchdog roles are not particularly strong in Chilean media. But the civic role is *higher* in the two television stations than the two newspapers, while the watchdog role is highest at the commercial television station, equal at the elite newspaper and TVN, and lowest at the popular newspaper. Important elements of H1 are thus disconfirmed by our results.

To test H2, we calculated the correlations among the three roles. As previous studies have shown, journalistic roles are independent dimensions (Mellado and van Dalen 2017) and cannot be reduced to dichotomous structures—such as, for example, a dimension with citizen-oriented and consumer-oriented roles as opposite ends (Hanitzsch 2007). In our study, the infotainment role, in particular, has a modest but significant *positive*—not negative—correlation with both of these factors (see Table 4). H2a is thus disconfirmed, and H2b is supported by the results.

Table 5 shows the results of a set of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, which make it possible to assess the relative influence of the type of medium—television versus print—and of audience orientation—popular versus elite—on the performance of different journalistic roles (RQ1). As our analysis includes the full range of news topics, we also control for story topic.

The regression analyses show significant medium differences for each of the three roles, while audience orientation is significant for the infotainment and civic roles, with popular media higher than the elite media in the first case and the opposite for the civic role.<sup>3</sup> The regression analyses also confirm that television remains higher on the watchdog and civic roles, even with story topic taken into account. If, for example, we repeat the analysis in Table 3 including only stories on government, politics, protests,

**Table 5.** OLS Regressions: Journalistic Roles (Dependent) on Medium, Audience Orientation and Story Topic (Standardized Regression Coefficients).

	Watchdog	Infotainment	Civic
Medium (TV)	.108***	.258***	.218***
Audience orientation (popular)	-.009	.223***	-.077***
Politics, government	.234***	-.123***	-.069**
Protests, social problems	.119***	-.003	.101***
Transportation, education, housing, public works	.061**	-.130***	.091***
Economy, work, energy	.017	-.140***	-.004
Police, crime	.279***	.010	-.024
Accidents, disasters	-.032	.007	.058*
Environment	-.015	-.054***	.016
Science, technology	-.025	-.060**	-.023
Health	.019	-.001	.023
Sports	-.018	.011	-.242***
Entertainment, celebrities	-.013	.105***	-.110***
R <sup>2</sup>	.148	.221	.151

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and social problems, the two television stations remain higher on both the watchdog and civic roles than the two newspapers, with the elite newspaper *La Tercera* lowest among the four media outlets.

Clearly, these results deviate from conventional understandings of the roles of television and the newspaper in a democratic system. In the final section of this paper, using both additional measures not included in the six role performance measures and interpretive analysis of subsamples of the stories, we look in closer detail at how the four sampled Chilean media are actually carrying out—or failing to carry out—the watchdog and civic functions of journalism.

### *Watchdog and Civic Roles in Chilean Television and Print*

Contrary to standard assumptions reflected in H1 and H2a that television journalism, with its tilt toward infotainment, is less likely than print journalism to perform the watchdog and civic roles, our data on Chilean TV and newspapers show that it is more likely to do so. To make sense of our findings, we need to look more closely at how, and in what context, the four Chilean news media in our sample are performing these roles.

If we turn first to the watchdog role, the data in Table 6 give one clue about what is going on. With indicators of the watchdog role which involved criticism or questioning, we coded for the actor toward which these were directed. The table shows the result for one of these indicators, questioning by the reporter of actors in the news. Other criticism or questioning indicators showed broadly similar patterns.

**Table 6.** Targets of Questioning by Reporter.

	<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>	TVN	Chilevisión
No questioning	96.8%	97.5%	92.2%	93.1%
Political elites	1.4	0.6	1.1	1.9
Economic elites	0.1	0.0	1.8	0.6
Celebrities	0.1	1.3	0.4	0.0
Sports figures	1.0	0.3	2.8	0.0
Ordinary people, civil society	0.4	0.4	1.7	4.4
More than one	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0

Note. TVN = Televisión Nacional de Chile.

Television reporters are more likely than print reporters, in general, to question and also to criticize actors in the news. This reflects the personalized, interpretive character of TV news observed in many studies (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Hallin 1992; Weaver 1975)—though few studies have directly compared television and print on these measures. (It was also reflected in a tendency of television to score higher in the interventionist role, the strongest medium-related difference found in our study.) In the case of the commercial TV channel Chilevisión, however, the most common object of criticism is not political or economic elites but ordinary citizens. This finding shows the fact that much of the watchdog reporting on Chilevisión takes place in the context of reporting on crime—the regression analysis shows a strong positive effect of the police/crime topic on the watchdog role—as well as neighborhood conflicts and other kinds of events that involve the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.

One typical story focused on a man who was arrested recording video under the dress of a ten-year-old girl but later released. It recounted similar incidents and featured residents criticizing light penalties for such crimes. Another was titled “*Guerra de Gas Callejera* [Street War over Gas]” and concerned a dispute between two gas distribution companies that escalated to violence. In these stories, the journalists’ primary criticisms are targeted at ordinary people presented as violating social norms. Even stories on Chilevisión where critical comments were directed at public officials or other elites tended to focus on the problems of particular individuals with lower level officials, as in one story about a woman who had been injured because of poorly maintained sidewalks and her long path through the court system to get compensation from the municipal government.

Watchdog stories genuinely focused on higher level political and economic elites were rare on Chilevisión, and as we looked closely at particular stories, many turned out to be relatively unsubstantial, often brief summaries by the anchor of news from other media about political scandals. TVN, by contrast, had fairly extensive coverage of a number of major scandals over campaign finance and political corruption that rocked Chilean politics at the time of our study. Our data thus support the argument that TVN, despite its commercial funding, is significantly different from commercial television in important ways.

**Table 7.** Percentage of Stories Including Civil Society and Citizen Sources.

	<i>La Tercera</i> (%)	<i>Las Ultimas Noticias</i> (%)	TVN (%)	Chilevisión (%)
Civil society	8.3	4.9	8.3	11.5
Citizen	5.8	19.0	40.1	66.2

Note. TVN = Televisión Nacional de Chile.

**Table 8.** Stories Devoted to Political Topics.

	<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>Las Ultimas Noticias</i>	TVN	Chilevisión
Government, elections	22.8%	7.0%	12.7%	6.0%
Protests, social problems	2.2	1.1	3.0	7.7
Transportation, housing, education, public works	5.1	8.2	5.2	4.9

Note. TVN = Televisión Nacional de Chile.

In the case of the watchdog role, then, the fact that television shows higher levels than print in the Chilean case turns not to conflict with the conventional wisdom about commercial TV's weaker democratic role as clearly as it appears on the surface. Commercial television's watchdog role reflects the performance of a "pseudo" watchdog style of reporting, previously identified in studies of "tabloid" media. In this style of reporting, journalists present themselves as champions of the people against those who violate social norms. But this is often in a context of private more than public life and is therefore typically not a form of reporting which serves to hold powerful actors in society accountable. It is also important to note that Chilean television shows a high level of watchdog reporting *relative* to a print press that has quite a *low* level on this role.

Turning to the civic role, we can again find clues to interpreting the results if we look at some other indicators. Table 7 shows the percentage of stories in each medium that include citizens or civil society actors as sources. Elite print media in Chile are strongly oriented toward elite actors, and the presence of ordinary citizens is quite limited. Television is a much more popular medium and has a strong tilt toward representing the point of view of the ordinary citizen. Individual citizens and even civil society actors have more presence in Chilean television than they do in the elite *La Tercera*.

Table 8 shows the percentage of stories focusing on three topic areas connected with politics in the broad sense. *La Tercera* has a much higher focus on elite politics than any of the other media. In this sense, the conventional wisdom that elite print media serve to inform citizens about public affairs is supported. TVN is second in its coverage of politics and government, showing that it is distinct from commercial television in important ways. However, protests and social problems are actually covered *more* by Chilevisión than by any other medium, and coverage of social services like housing, transportation, and education—topics that involve the direct impact of public policy in the lives of ordinary citizens—is as common in television as it is in *La Tercera* and highest at *Las Ultimas Noticias*.

Television news in Chile is full of stories in which citizens voice opinions, complaints, and demands about problems affecting their lives. Many are quite lengthy, with many sources and a diversity of perspectives (contrary to the idea that the print press provides more complex reporting, Chilevisión stories had twice as many sources as those in *La Tercera*, on average, and television stories were significantly more likely to have a diversity of sources and points of view). One Chilevisión story covers complaints by users of the Santiago Metro about dirty stations and the absence of trash cans, which were removed following a terrorist attack. Responsibility for the situation is assigned both to officials and to metro users themselves. Another Chilevisión story covers concerns by residents about security in a local park in Santiago and includes sound bites from representatives from a neighborhood association, from the municipal government, and from residents with conflicting views about whether to limit access to the park. Some of these stories, similar to the watchdog stories cited above, are very much focused on particular individuals either as victims or as villains—a story about an old woman whose electricity was cut off by the electric company, for example; or another about an elderly woman abandoned by her relatives. This finding is in line with recent studies, such as the work of Kleemans et al. (2017) on Dutch television, finding that although citizen sources became more prominent in news, they do not get a necessarily more relevant voice in public debate (also Lewis et al. 2004). Other stories did focus on institutional actors, such as a Chilevisión story on complaints about odor and pollution from residents near a meat-packing plant. That story centered on a citizen who had posted a documentary about the problem on social media and included a response from the plant manager. Here Chilevisión seemed clearly to be facilitating citizen action, carrying a complaint by an activist citizen to a wider audience and forcing the company to respond publicly.

Stories on TVN were particularly high on the indicator for supporting citizen movements. Some of these stories had to do with relatively institutionalized efforts like the involvement of citizens in a World Health Organization-sponsored antismoking campaign in which the health ministry was also involved. (TVN was slightly higher than other media on the loyal-facilitator role, and this type of story could be seen as fitting that pattern by supporting policy initiatives that involve citizen participation.) Others had a more critical edge, such a story on protests related to mining and water, which showed citizens on both sides of the issue, and a story on residents protesting private landowners who cut off access to public beaches. The beach access story, part of a series on the topic, provided a phone number for citizens to call to make *denuncias*—reports of violations—and had supporting statements from government ministers—in that sense it seemed to reflect divisions in the Chilean elite.

In relation to the civic role, then, the Chilean case clearly seems to conflict with the conventional wisdom that the print press—particularly the “quality press”—is superior to television as an institution of democratic citizenship, and to support the view of a number of scholars who have argued for more nuanced understandings of the social roles of commercialized or “tabloid” news (Brants 1998; Langer 1998; Lumby 1999). *La Tercera* is narrowly oriented toward political and economic elites, and its attention to ordinary citizens and to civil society is very limited. It gives them little voice, pays

little attention their perspectives or concerns, and does not portray them as central social actors. The only indicator associated with the civic role on which *La Tercera* scored higher than Chilevisión was Providing Background Information (TVN scored the highest on this indicator).

In television news, the role and perspective of the ordinary citizen are central, and television therefore scores higher on many of the indicators of the civic role included in our study: reporting on citizen perspectives, demands, and activities; supporting citizen movements; and reporting on the impact of events on local communities. The ways Chilean television, particularly commercial television, performed these functions were often narrow, to be sure, consistent with critiques of commercialized “tabloid” news (Sparks and Tulloch 2000). There was a strong focus on individual-level problems and solutions, rather than systemic or structural ones, and relatively little focus on organized civil society and collective action. A significant part of the watchdog coverage on Chilevisión fit the pattern Hallin (2000) found in Mexican tabloid television focusing on citizen outrage about crime—a narrow agenda often tied to class or racial stereotypes and conservative political ideology. Crime was the largest subject category on Chilevisión, accounting for 23 percent of stories, more than triple the coverage of government and politics. But in many other stories, Chilean television did seem to give a real opportunity, absent in the “quality” print press, for citizens to express their views on issues that touched their lives.

## **Conclusion**

Television journalism, at least in its commercial form, has widely been seen as inferior to print journalism in its contribution to democratic politics. But empirical research on differences in reporting styles and news content between television and the print press—almost exclusively in the United States and Western Europe—has produced mixed results and has never clearly settled an issue debated since the early days of television. Using a broad set of standardized measures of journalistic roles in news, we found that Chilean television and print journalism did indeed differ in important ways, and that the effect of medium (television vs. print) was greater than that of audience orientation (elite vs. popular). The differences did not match common assumptions about the democratic roles of the two platforms, however. The infotainment role was higher in television, particularly commercial television. Nevertheless, television was higher in both of the roles normally associated with journalism’s functions as an institution of democratic citizenship—the watchdog and civic roles.

To some extent, the fact that television scores higher than print on the civic and watchdog roles reflects a low level of both these roles in Chilean newspapers. Here it is important to keep in mind the political context in which contemporary Chilean media were formed. During the Pinochet dictatorship, political pluralism in the press was suppressed and a press system was set up that was, in the words of León-Dermota (2003), “well tied-down”: closely tied to economic and political elites, and passive in its orientation toward political reporting (see also Hughes and Mellado 2016). After the transition to democracy, the concentrated ownership structure was maintained. The

political structure that emerged from the “pacted transition” to democracy, moreover, was intended to avoid high levels of political mobilization, and the political culture associated with it, while embracing press freedom and political pluralism, carried over important elements of the depoliticization established during the Pinochet era.

Each of the media we examined can be said to serve democratic politics in certain ways, and each has important limitations. *La Tercera*, the elite newspaper, gives extensive attention to politics. But its role is a mainly passive one, as a disseminator of information about the activities and views of elites. It does not often play the watchdog role, exposing violations of social norms or abuses of power, nor does it often play the civic role, facilitating citizen participation. Chilevisión gives limited attention to politics and government but is much more popular in character and much more oriented toward the ordinary citizen. It does play the watchdog role, though in a narrow range of contexts, focusing on individual-level problems and not playing much of a role either in holding higher level power holders to account or in connecting those individual-level problems to structure and policy. This is consistent with findings on commercial television and tabloid news in many contexts. “Citizens may feel, desire or complain, but they do not, on the whole, discuss the merits of political ideas—at least not on television news” (Lewis et al. 2004: 162).

Chilevisión also plays the civic role somewhat more robustly, giving voice to the complaints, perspectives, and initiatives of citizens in many contexts. But here, too, there are limitations; Chilevisión gives limited attention to organized civil society and again tends to ignore wider structural forces. TVN gives extensive coverage of public affairs, with a popular orientation toward citizen voices, similar to Chilevisión. Its performance of the watchdog and civic roles is not high, reflecting the Chilean pattern of depoliticization, but it does have many characteristics of a real public service broadcaster. *Las Últimas Noticias* does not play either the watchdog or the civic role very strongly. It is most notable, beyond its pure infotainment role, for stories providing advice to citizens related to public services.

In general, these findings support the view articulated in recent scholarship on journalistic role performance according to which journalistic roles are not discrete but can combine in complex ways. In particular, they underscore the need to think through more fully the relationship between infotainment and political reporting, and between consumerist and citizen-oriented logics in news production. Our data clearly run counter to the hypothesis that these should be seen as having simple, zero-sum, unilinear relationship to one another: The infotainment role in our data was positively, not negatively, correlated with the civic and watchdog roles, and all three were highest in commercial television. When we look at the stories, it is not hard to understand why this is the case. Stories that include elements of the watchdog and civic roles, as they often involved ordinary citizens mobilized by perceived injustices, were typically high in personalization, emotion, and conflict; in that sense, in many contexts today, these journalistic roles go naturally together. In this way, we have provided substantially important evidence of how infotainment can go hand in hand with the performance of traditional democratic roles.

This study shows that our methodological approach allows scholars to use a standardized content-based index of journalistic roles in news to empirically investigate within-country and across-country variation in different media's performance in different contexts, media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004), and transitional regime types (Voltmer 2013). Our findings also underscore the importance of using qualitative analyses as a complementary approach to better understand the performance of professional roles in news content.

Television and print are not, of course, the only important news media, and it would be important to extend this analysis to other media as well. In the Chilean case, as in many media systems, radio news is extensive and widely used, and Internet-based media are growing in importance and may fill important niches in the news ecology distinct from those of other media.

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### Notes

1. Prior to our main analyses, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using Mplus 7.0. Within the Power Relations domain, the watchdog role provided a good fit with the data ( $\chi^2 = 425,873$ ,  $p < .001$ , Root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .023, Comparative fit index [CFI] = .912, Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = .945). Within the audience approach domain, the infotainment and the civic roles also showed a satisfactory good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 1,023.2$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .036, CFI = .909, TLI = .891.
2. As each role represents a latent variable, the factor score is technically a better measurement in having weighed the indicators that compose it, according to how much each item contributes to that latent variable (DiStefano et al. 2009).
3. We also looked at interactions between medium and audience orientations. In general, the results did not change the picture reported in Table 5, so we do not report them in detail. The one exception was for the watchdog role, where medium had an effect only for popular, not for elite media: Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN) and *La Tercera* were not significantly different, while Chilevisión was substantially higher than *Últimas Noticias*.

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