

Media Systems in an International Comparative Perspective
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El Salvador's media system

Political polarization and ideological alignment

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1. Introduction

On the 15th of March 2009, the former Marxist guerrilla outfit, *Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front* (FMLN in Spanish initials) won the presidential election after 17 years being in the opposition. FMLN's candidate Mauricio Funes – a former CNN correspondent and popular anchorman – was elected with a turnout of 51 percent, while his only contender, Rodrigo Ávila – nominated by the right-wing party *Republican Nationalist Alliance* (ARENA in Spanish) – reached 48 percent.

In his campaign, Funes strongly criticized the role of the mainstream media as loyal ally of ARENA. Funes pointed out that he was under the “the impression that rather the media are the FMLN's opponents than ARENA”.¹ The words of the candidate reveal one of the most important features of El Salvador's media model (Rockwell and Janus 2003): the alignment of the media along two ideological trenches that are represented by Arena and FMLN.

The ideological gap between the two media groups can be traced down to the Civil War, which ended in 1992. During the war, mainstream media were the mouthpiece of ARENA and other far right efforts. On the contrary, the rebels' propaganda unities created a sort of a revolutionary community among rural and city supporters of the Salvadorian guerrilla force.

In 1992, the government ruled by ARENA and the insurgents of FMLN agreed to put an end to 12 years of Civil War, a conflict which provoked thousands of dead and hundred of millions of dollars in economic losses. Since the beginning of the post-war democracy, El Salvador's political polarization has been an increasing trend. FMLN and ARENA have one of the wider ideological gaps among Latin America parties (Alcántara and Rivas 2006) and the amount of local governments and seats in the National Assembly in control of the two parties grows with every election. In March 2009, the polarization scaled to a new level. For the first time since the end of the war, ARENA and FMLN were the only competitors in the first of two possible presidential rounds. The other four parties retired their

candidates in order to endorse Funes or Ávila. A multiparty political system was transformed temporarily in a “de facto” bipartisan scenario.

Political changes are one of the most important inputs to shape media systems and media coverage (Strömback and Kaid 2008, Kleinsteuber 2007, Schudson 1995). In peace processes, such as the Salvadoran, politics play the main role in changing the media performance. As Rahat and Sheaffer (2007) stress, politics “always” comes before major changes in the media.

This paper affirms that the close ties between politics and media are the most important feature of the Salvadoran media system. The polarization of the Salvadoran political system has been historically – and still is – resembled in the media system (Rockwell and Janus 2003, Janus 1999, Rockwell 2002, Darling 2007, Wolf 2007, López V. 1961). Hallin and Mancini (2004) conceptualize the reflection of the political system in the media system as “political parallelism”. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) design a special concept of “political parallelism” for South European and Latin American media: clientelism. In this essay, we utilize the framework behind Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos in order to describe the Salvadoran media. Nevertheless, we go beyond their limitation that equals the media system with mainstream media and ownership concentration. In our opinion, “political parallelism” should be understood as the logic of Salvadoran media being aligned whether to ARENA or FMLN. Salvadoran leftist outlets cannot compete in size and ratings with the mainstream media. They are not comparable to the big European left-wing media as *El País* in Spain or *die tageszeitung (TAZ)* in Germany. These are the reasons why we adapt the theories of Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos.

Even though partisan alignment is the key concept of this paper, we do not attempt to hide the existence of outlets, which challenge this polarized logic in the Salvadoran media. We will describe briefly how the Internet weekly *El Faro* challenges the bipolar political tendency of the media system. However, the rebellious position of this weekly just reflects the centrifugal political force of the media, a reality that cannot be underestimated.

The aim of this paper is to extract the theories on media systems from the stable tradition of the First World democracies and plant them into a more instable context such as Latin America. El Salvador can be a good laboratory to confirm, remodel or rebut the theories crafted in the global North.

This paper is structured into three main parts. Firstly (2), we give a historical review of the El Salvadoran media system and explain the current situation of democracy and freedom of expression. In the following part (3) we attempt to describe why some comparative approaches cannot be applied to the Salvadoran media system. We can neither apply the transformation approach of Kleinstauber (2007), nor the four normative models of McQuail (2005), nor the oversimplified four theories of press written by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) during the Cold War. In the last part (4) we describe the Salvadoran media system using Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002). The two theories have been adapted and changed in order to fit in our illustration of El Salvador.

2. El Salvador's media system in a historical context

To place emphasis on the specifics of the El Salvadoran media system we revert to Rockwell and Janus (2003) who elucidate El Salvador's media scene by the examination of the country's historical context: "This history will prove to be the most important factor shaping the country's media system, more important than external pressures" (Rockwell and Janus 2003 p. 34). Today's media landscape in El Salvador can be explained by the country's deeply rooted social and political polarization, eminently noticeable in the civil war that took place between 1980 and 1992 as well as the hegemony of a rich oligarchy.

Beside these domestic forces for change, there are external forces, both of which are strongly interwoven. Outside influences are mostly connected to policy interest of the United States. During the Reagan administration, the country was a focal point of the policy of the United States. El Salvador was framed by the United States in the crossroad of

the Cold War: U.S versus the socialist bloc. Cuba and the USSR supported the leftist insurgency whilst Washington backed the Salvadoran government with millions of dollars in military aid.

In this part, we focus on internal historical developments in order to portray the special characteristics that have led to El Salvador's current media system. We will outline which impact the country's social and political premises had on the media scene in prewar time (2.1), during the war years (2.2), in the postwar era (2.3) and the current situation of democracy and freedom of expression (2.4). In every phase, politics, economy and media are strongly interwoven.

2.1 Media in prewar time

With a military regime and an oligarchic elite controlling and suppressing the country since 1932, in the 1970s the sociopolitical situation in El Salvador got worse. Since there was no democracy, protests and revolts rose and the opposition gained influence. It was a hard decade for the media as they were bounded to the regime. Most newspapers served as governmental agents in order to make propaganda, like the two top newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica*. Censorship was reached by the mean of corruption: Journalists were paid in favour of an one-sided and imbalanced media coverage. Only few fought for objectivity, reported idependently and moaned about the social injustice in the country, for instance the paper *Latino*. Labeled as „Vocero de la Guerilla“ (voice of the guerilla) the sheet had to suffer firebomb attacks (Kreussler 2003 p. 90).

In the electronic media, there was little information about the social and political conflict, which led to a lack of information in the populace (Kreussler 2003 p. 90). Only upcoming alternative radio stations presented different views against the military government. Thus, these media stations were target of violent encroachments by the government. By the end of the 1970s, the situation escalated. The families of the agricultural oligarchy strengthened their support of the military power through mainstream newspapers. On the opposite side,

five Marxist guerilla organizations started to consolidate their unity as FMLN to reinforce their clandestine propaganda units.

One political event marked the end of 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. In October 1979, a coup d'état overthrew the last military president, General Humberto Romero. An alliance of Christian Democratic politicians and high ranked army men overtook the government.

2.2 Media during the war years (1980 – 1992)

With the outbreak of war, the situation for the media got even worse. Emergency rule was imposed – and censorship legalized. During the early years of the conflict, the government attacked media outlets that gave their support to left wing movements, and journalists were hunted by death squads. An objective and balanced coverage was nearly impossible. Foreign correspondents only broadcasted the official government versions. Many foreign journalists were accused to cover in favour of the opposition (Kreussler 2003 pp. 91-96).

At the beginning of the war, El Salvador's elite class represented some 2 percent of the population and controlled more than 66 percent of its land. In the early 1980s, when the country finally turned to more moderate leaders, after the coup d'état, members of the oligarchy founded the conservative party ARENA, which rich Salvadorans in the United States and Guatemala helped finance (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 32-33).

The polarized politics and the class divisions of El Salvador's society were reflected in the media, particularly in newspapers. During the war, the country's two leading newspapers both supported ARENA. The daily newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* for instance was a corrupt, poorly designed propaganda publication for ARENA. Journalists who worked for the paper were often submitted to censorship, either from editors in favor of economic and political interests of oligarchic leaders or directly from governmental elites. The content of the newspaper was directly linked to the ideology of ARENA. Also members of opposition

groups were killed after the columns of *El Diario de Hoy* denounced them. When the civil war began, the country had only two television programmes, both of which were tightly controlled. As news media were subject to state censorship, mostly news were limited to social and commercial news like weddings, birthdays or store openings, which carried no or only little information about the local and national politics as well as the social conflict. This weak news culture can be traced back to the fact that large newspapers, such as *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica*, in the late 1970s were owned by families who supported the military government and ARENA. (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 31-35).

Beside the media that were controlled by government, the FMLN installed its own means of communication, like journals, a news agency, cinema and predominantly radio. During the war years, a legendary group of underground radio stations operated in El Salvador backing the FMLN. As clandestine stations like *Radio Venceremos* or *Radio Farabundo* reported and complained about the violent conflict, they were hunted by the military forces. *Radio Venceremos* created a community of very diverse listeners around the country. The information given by *Radio Venceremos* was also used by international correspondents to balance the governmental versions about the war (Darling 2007).

The repression against opposition media can be fixed on the shut-down of newspapers that purely didn't give a total backing. In 1980, death squads murdered the editors and the staff of *La Crónica de Pueblo* as well as the army destroyed *El Independiente* in 1981. In that time, the daily newspaper *El Mundo* changed its editorial slant. The newspaper *Co-Latino* (former *Latino*) survived as the only government critic, although its main office was damaged by a firebomb attack. Even during the more moderate Duarteⁱⁱ era, when the media could cover more freely, the government dictated just how far reporters could go and how far they could push the ideological boundaries. Journalists anyhow appreciated even this limited freedom, whereas the leading newspapers, which were aligned with ARENA, took advantage of the reduced censorship and attacked the Duarte administration. This period of openness was followed by the presidency of Cristianiⁱⁱⁱ of ARENA, who revived censorship for much of the media (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 34-40).

2.3 Media in the postwar era

After 12 years of war, El Salvador left behind the military hegemony and the FMLN was constitutionally legalized. By then the country started to reform itself. So did the media. The violent attacks against journalists stopped and the media coverage got more pluralistic and independent. Topics concerning democracy, peace or the environment as well as the expression of opinions found their way into the media coverage (Kreussler 2003 p. 96).

To exemplify this postwar process of modernization, the daily newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* is a good example: Under Fabricio Altamirano – the third generation of Altamiranos to lead the newspaper – the conservative newspaper decided for a move towards objectivity in the mid 1990s, recognizing that the readers wanted something different and reacting to changes at competing papers: New sections were added, the layout was redesigned and the newspaper's content was reworked by a new, young and well trained staff replacing the elder, corrupt midcareer journalists for the benefit of a less obvious slant in favour of ARENA (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 31-34).

But the change toward more pluralism was not as big as it appeared. Enrique Altamirano, Fabricio's father, who represents the publications's past, argued for limitation to the modernization program to support the family's conservative ideas by the newspaper. For years he objected to report on the nation's left or former guerrillas other than in a very negative sense. That way the elder Altamirano has still stepped into the editorial content of the paper during the 1990s and even today does insert his political views (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 31-40). As Rockwell and Janus state, "such rigid conservatism is common in the political and economic atmosphere of El Salvador, a country that is ruled by an oligarchy that became notorious during the civil war" (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 33).

Furthermore, Rockwell and Janus (2003) remark that what appears to be competition and objectivity may actually reflect interelite political battles inside a changing oligarchic system, inside the dominant party ARENA. For instance when the ARENA-aligned newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* intensified the coverage on the Christian Democrats and lend

them its support in the presidential elections of 1999, a reason for this move was Enrique Altamiranos personal animosity toward the ARENA candidate Flores (Janus 1999).

With the beginning of the 21st century *El Diario de Hoy* fell back into partisan behaviour, attacking FMLN members and media institutions that didn't support ARENA. As they had in the war period, *El Diario de Hoy's* editorial columns became required reading because of Enrique's attacks on the opposition (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 38-39).

In an overall perspective, most of the newspapers changed their rigid support of ARENA due to the modernization process in the postwar years, but altogether they have leant towards backing the nation's conservative oligarchy. ARENA in the postwar years still has dominated the electoral and media processes, which indicates that the media owners and leaders belong to the elite that has committed itself to back El Salvador's economic oligarchy. Rockwell and Janus' examination of the Salvadoran media tends to affirm their theory that media systems support and reflect oligarchic tendencies, especially when the nation lacks strong democratic roots (Rockwell and Janus 2003 p. 39-41). The majority of the daily circulation of over 250,000 copies is controlled by the pro-government newspapers *La Prensa Gráfica*, *El Diario de Hoy* and *Diario El Mundo* (WAN, 2006 pp. 617).^{iv}

As far as radio is concerned most of the former rebel stations in 1992 became legalized within the peace agreement and thus more traditional commercial enterprises. Being part of almost 200 stations that share the AM and FM radio frequencies in El Salvador the previous underground stations soon lost their alternative and left-oriented sound. To survive in this competitive environment, the former supporters of the FMLN soon played commercial music instead of protest music and accepted paid announcements from the government (Rohter 1995, Rockwell and Janus 2003 p. 41-44).

Not only the sale of airtime to ARENA and the party's extremely organized campaigns in 1999 but also economic concerns let radio stations shift ideologically. As owners are not taxed on profits from their media enterprises in El Salvador, many feared that an FMLN presidential victory would lead to taxes and other political restrictions on the media. Thus a

lot of stations were willing to take ARENA's money in favor of imbalanced radio coverage due to contractual arrangements with the party functionaries working in the news department. The reasons may be party organization, economic fears or financial enticement, but as a matter of fact the major radio networks became the voice of the oligarchy during the 1999 campaign (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 42-43). Currently, the right-wing oriented *Association of Broadcasters of El Salvador* (ASDER in Spanish) owns 65 out of 196 radio-stations established in the country (CIA, 2005).

After the dismantle of the former clandestine radio-stations, the FMLN, as political party, started to create a network with community radio-stations, cable television channels and the only left-wing daily newspaper, *Co Latino*. One of these pro-FMLN outlets is *Radio Mayavisión*, which is the party's official radio. A European Union study reveals that *Radio Mayavisión* reported twice as much on FMLN than on ARENA (EU 2009).

Television has the same penetration as radio in El Salvador, connecting daily with 70 percent of the population. The country's dominant broadcaster, Boris Eersky, part and supporter of the conservative and anticommunist elite, owns *Telecorporación Salvadoreña* (TCS), which is formed by the country's three most-watched television channels and controls 90 percent of the nation's viewing audience. Eersky is known for giving large amounts of free television time to his associates in ARENA, the party also being linked to the news department. It is important to understand how Eersky operates to understand the Salvadoran media landscape as he has used the country's broadcast system to manipulate its political and economic system. He wanted to guard his media holdings from globalization and international media concentration. He has concentrated power in his own country and attempted building barriers to new owners and therefore restricted competition and democracy. For instance in the later 1990s he wanted to bar Mexican businessmen from extending their media enterprises in El Salvador and blocked the sale as he made use of his political influence and connections. Anyhow, Mexican broadcasters managed to buy a channel, *Canal 12*. But the Mexican investment didn't change the basic balance between stations and their ratings. The most watched channels still represent the conservative ideas

of Esersky and his political associates. Critical programs are sent by *Canal 12* that gets low ratings (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 44-47).

To sum it up, in the postwar era the media landscape in El Salvador has been dominated by the interests and ideas of the conservative party ARENA. In contrast, the influence of leftist-oriented media has been quite limited.

2.4 Current situation of democracy and freedom of expression

El Salvador is rated as a free country in the annual report of *Freedom House*, an international non-governmental organization that ranks countries by political rights and civil liberties due to a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free) and thus assesses them as free, partly free or unfree. In the 2008 assessment El Salvador got a score of 2 in political rights and a 3 in civil liberties, earning the designation of „free“. This assessment can be traced back to several facts that *Freedom House* states in its 2008 analyse of El Salvador. Among other criteria, the 2006 legislative and 2004 presidential elections were deemed free and fair. However, corruption is regarded as a serious problem throughout government. The government does not encroach upon religious freedom as well as academic freedom is respected. The authorities generally hold up freedoms of assembly and association, but as vaguely verbalized antiterrorism law passed by the end of 2006 opponents have raised concerns about a potential return to repressive practices. (*Freedom House 2008^v*)

As far as the media system is concerned, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are provided by Constitution. *Freedom House* factors in its assessment that the media institutions are privately owned, but all belong to a small elite of powerful businesspeople who often impose control on journalists to protect their economic or political interests. They take certain occurrences into account, like in 2007, when the leftist party FMLN accused the newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica* of blocking freedom of expression when it denied publishing an advertisement that would criticize the government. It is also important that El Salvador's journalists have to submit to criminal defamation laws, and judges can

close legal proceedings to the media for reasons of national security. It is relevant that in 2003 the Legislative Assembly liberated reporters from having to reveal their sources if they had to testify in a court case. At least 14 journalists were assaulted in July 2006, either by protesters or police, while reporting on street demonstrations. (*Freedom House* 2008^{vi})

“It is not economic prosperity but peace that guarantees press freedom.”^{vii} This is the „main lesson“ that according to *Reporters without Borders* can be drawn from the world press freedom index that the organization compiles every year. El Salvador is on the 62nd position in 2008’s worldwide press freedom ranking of 168 countries analyzed by the international non-governmental organization *Reporters without Borders*, that advocates freedom of the press and publishes an annual ranking of countries based upon the organization’s measurement of their press freedom records. In comparison to the other Central American countries El Salvador has a middle ranking after Costa Rica (22nd), Panama (57), Nicaragua (59) and before Honduras (99) and Guatemala (101). Belize is not ranked. Holding the 62nd position, the country has fallen noticeably in comparison to the years 2004 and 2005, when the small and impoverished democracy appeared high in the list (28th), apparently being close on the heels of Europe whose countries nearly hold the first 20 positions. Because of the fickleness of the young democracy El Salvador may have dropped gradually from the Top 50 (2006: 41st, 2007: 64th), not least because there have been violent attacks directly affecting journalists (such as murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats), e.g. the murder of 39 year old freelance radio journalist Salvador Sánchez, who was shot dead in the town of Soyapango, near the capital, San Salvador, by suspected gangsters in September 2007.^{viii} Also journalist María Haydee Chicas was arrested during a demonstration in July 2007 on terrorism charge condemned as violation of constitution, which *Reporters without Borders* judge as „clear violation of free expression” and as „ridiculous and dangerous to claim that someone who was just doing their job as a journalist was caught in the act of ‘terrorism.’”^{ix} Against the background of such attacks the drop on the 62nd position is justified, we think. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that due to the nature of the survey's methodology based on individual perceptions of the organization’s correspondents, journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists, there can be wide contrasts in a country's ranking from year to year.

3. Beyond the transformation approach, normative framework and Cold War theories

The end of the Civil War in El Salvador has been framed within a “third wave of democratizations”^x in Latin America. This phenomenon started in 1978 with the return to democracy in the Dominican Republic and terminated with the end of 70 years of a single party hegemony in the presidency of Mexico in 2000 (Hagopian 2006 pp. 231-239). An unprecedented “frenzy” of free national elections flowered the region from 1989 to 1990, i.e. 26 elections, including the first free election in Chile after 16 years of conservative dictatorship (Salwen and Garrison 1991 p. 1). Only Cuba and Haiti remained out of that democratic heyday.

Hagopian applied Huntington’s global theory of “the third wave of democratizations” onto Latin America. While Huntington (1991) exposes a global transition from “non democratic to democratic political systems” in some 30 countries in the world between 1974 and 1990 (p. xiii), Hagopian groups the collapse of autocracies, the end of the civil wars and the arising of elections in a Latin American “third wave of democratization”.

As Hagopian, Kleinstauber (2007) bases his comparative approach of the transformation of media systems on the theory of Huntington. Nevertheless, he assures that the concept of transformation goes beyond the idea of “democratization” which refers only to the transformation of a political system. Kleinstauber proposes that this political concept might be applied to the media using the word “transformation” instead of “democratization” or “transition”. He advocates for a new perspective in which individual and collective changes will be stressed:

Media systems are characterized by stability, autonomy and only gradual change that usually means adoption to a changing environment. Therefore the student of media looks mainly at organizations, structures, markets conventions, the journalistic professions, etc. [...] (T)he focus of transformations is much more oriented towards the collective and individual actor, specially those that demand, support and change (p. 4).

Kleinsteuber identifies a series of patterns of transformation in the media systems of countries, which shifted from authoritarian to democratic systems. He focuses on three historical phases: 1) Southern European countries, 2) Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile and Argentina) and 3) former socialist states in Eastern Europe. He assures that the “third waves“ brought transformation in fields such as the ownership concentration and the consolidation of public service. But media systems were not only affected, they also were actors in the process of transformation of political systems (Kleinsteuber 2007 p. 10).

The idea that lies behind Huntington, Hagopian and Kleinsteuber suggests the existence of democratic societies and media systems in the countries touched by the “third wave of democratization”. Can this assumption be applied to the Salvadoran media system? No. The opening of the political system did not bring automatically the rebuilding of the Salvadoran media. Firstly, El Salvador’s political changes did not take place after a key event. Kleinsteuber exemplifies his transformation approach with the cases of Brazil, Argentina and Chile. These three countries had long right-wing dictatorships that lasted until the mid 1980s and early 1990s. In El Salvador, the democratization process passed through a grey zone between authoritarianism and democracy. After the collapse of the military regime in 1979, several elections were held in El Salvador with the participation of a good amount of parties, but with the marginalization of a wide spectrum of the left.

Even though Huntington (1991) characterizes the 1984 election of Duarte, the first non-military president in decades, as the entrance of El Salvador to democracy (p. 15), Mainwaring et al. (2001) deny to automatically refer to this as democratization. Mainwaring et al. assure that El Salvador’s political system was highly limited by the power of the army during the 1980s: “The military and the paramilitary were beyond the control of the civilian government and ruthlessly killed tens of thousands of leftists and purported leftist sympathizers. Electoral outcomes unacceptable to the military were ruled out” (p. 45). El Salvador, they sustain, was a semi-democratic regime until 1991.

Latin American media systems still carry with the legacy of a time of dictators and political repression. A real transformation is in process in a region that is characterized by structural

barriers. Hughes and Lawson (2005) identify five general barriers towards the creation of independent, pluralistic and assertive media systems in the region (p. 10):

(a) violence against journalists encouraged by a generalized weakness in the rule of law; (b) holdover authoritarian laws and policies that chill assertive reporting; (c) oligarchic ownership of television, the region's dominant medium; (d) the continuing spottiness of professional journalistic norms; and (e) the limited reach of print media, community-based broadcasters, and new communication technologies.

With the model of ownership concentration, Hughes and Lawson (2005) exemplify the difficulties to separate the media from the close ties between the autocrats of the past and the political elites of today. Oligopolies dominate the market in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela. In Guatemala, a single entrepreneur controls all four of the television stations with a national reach (Hughes and Lawson 2005 p. 13).

In El Salvador, the media is also controlled by few: Boris Esersky controls the most important television channels, pro-ARENA newspapers dominate the print market and the commercial radios are united in a organization that supports conservative positions (Rockwell and Janus 2003 pp. 244; WAN, 2006 pp. 617).

In summary, the transformation perspective of Kleinstauber is insufficient to describe the complex nature of the Salvadoran media system. Structural barriers like the ownership concentration interplay with the openness for left-oriented or independent outlets. If the transformation approach cannot be applied on El Salvador, what other frameworks can illustrate its media system?

We have to discard also the multi-model perspective of McQuail (2005) and the press models of Siebert et al. (1956) inspired by the Cold War. Firstly, McQuail's theory is a normative approach to analyze media systems. He does not provide tools to study how media systems are constructed at the present. Instead, he stresses the necessity to think how we should construct a media system. We remark that this paper does not attempt to open a debate in the normative field. We have limited our scope to describe the Salvadoran media system with some theoretical framework. Secondly, Siebert et al. (1956) propose four global models based on the confrontation Soviet Union-United States: the authoritarian model, the libertarian model, the Soviet model and the social responsibility model. Though

they provide a fundamental overview of the ideological background in the Cold War, the current political and media changes need new artefacts to understand the reality. The unique features of El Salvador would only be obscured if we forced the reality to fit into one of the four models of Siebert et al.

Thus, in the next part, we examine El Salvador's media system with the comparative framework of Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002). Both theories showed us the way to find the most important feature of the El Salvadoran media system: the political and ideological polarization of the media outlets.

4. The Polarized Clientelist Model

We have remarked why several frameworks of media systems cannot be applied on El Salvador. Now we describe the Salvadoran media system using the theory of Hallin and Mancini (2004), a tool to compare media systems in Europe. Also we utilize the concept of clientelism to explain the type of relationship between media and politics in Latin America (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). Why do we use Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos to outline the Salvadoran media system? We think their emphasis on politics helps us to comprehend the partisan and ideological force as one of the strongest "leitmotifs" of Salvadoran media. We adapted some of their conceptualizations. Later on, we present our reinterpretation of Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos.

The close relationship between media and politics is not new in El Salvador. Previous literature points that strong connection during the whole 19th and 20th century. (Rockwell and Janus 2003, Janus 1999, Rockwell 2002, López V. 1961, Wolf 2007). López V. (1961) acknowledges how in the early days of El Salvador's independence newspapers easily felt into two groups: liberals and conservatives. Rockwell and Janus (2003) recognize a similar situation in the media during the 12 years of Civil War and after the peace accord: the existence of two political and ideological media fronts.

El Salvador has an environment with “high political parallelism” (Hallin and Mancini 2004 p. 74). For Hallin and Mancini, a realm with highly political parallelism is the one in which the structure of a media system can be described similar to the party system. Hallin and Mancini argue that in Europe the high political parallelism is one of the characteristics of the Southern European or polarized pluralist media systems (Greece, Spain, Italy, France).

The Polarized Pluralist Model is characterized by a high level of politicization, with the state and political parties intervening strongly in many areas of social life and with much of the population holding strong loyalties to widely varying political ideologies. Loyalty to these ideologies goes along with widespread scepticism about any conception of a “common good” that would transcend them, and a relative absence of commonly agreed rules and norms. The news media are similarly characterized by a high degree of external pluralism, in which media are seen as champions of diverse political ideologies, and commitment to these ideologies, a commitment to these ideologies tends to outweigh commitment to a common professional culture.

The scholars also stress the close relationship between journalists and politicians and the state’s intervention into the polarized system. But we do neither emphasize the role of Salvadoran journalists, nor the influence of the state. We focus on two of the four major dimensions of Hallin and Mancini’s framework: the development of media market and political parallelism. The other two dimensions (professionalization of journalists and the role of the state) can be loosely analyzed due the lack of research.

Hallin and Mancini construct the Southern European system in comparison with two other media systems: The Democratic Corporatist Model (Germany and Scandinavian countries) and the Liberal Model (Great Britain, Ireland). The Democratic Corporatist Model shares with the Southern European model a high level of political parallelism in the media, but they differ in the level of development of the mass press. The Democratic Corporatist Model is characterized by a higher level of readership and by more autonomy of the media. The Liberal Model is a system with low political parallelism and state intervention and a higher professionalization of journalists. In a comparative perspective, the Polarized Pluralist Model would be the one with closer ties to political parties and the liberal, the one with fewer. The Democratic Corporatist Model might be in the middle.

As regards Latin America, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) assure that the systems of Colombia, Mexico and Brazil can be described in a similar way with the polarized model,

even if in extreme form (p. 175). They find five major commonalities between the two models: low levels of newspaper circulation, tradition of advocacy reporting, instrumentalization of privately-owned media, politicization of public broadcasting and broadcast regulation as well as limited development of journalism as an autonomous profession. Historical connections and the obvious parallels in their political development can be two possible reasons for the commonalities.

Hallin and Papathanassopoulos argue that the similarities of both models can elaborate a new concept to portray the influence of politics in media: the clientelism. According to Hallin and Papathanassopoulos “clientelism” refers to

a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support. It is a particularistic and asymmetrical form of social organization, and is typically contrasted with forms of citizenship in which access to resources is based on universalistic criteria and formal equality before the law. [...] Clientelistic relationships have been central to the social and political organization of all seven countries covered here. In Italy it is referred to as clientelismo, in Greece as rousfeti, in Spanish-speaking countries as caciquismo or caudillismo and in Brazil as coronelismo. (pp. 184-185).

How can the clientelism, as an extreme of political parallelism, be detected in the Salvadoran media system? The ideological and partisan alignment of the media in two antagonistic blocs demonstrates the high level of clientelism in El Salvador (Rockwell and Janus 2003). In-depth interviews with Salvadoran print media journalists, who interacted simultaneously with newspaper owners and reporters, confirm that the editorial decisions were highly influenced by a dichotomized perspective of the society (Valencia 2008). This wide spread assumption of two ideological forces on the one hand shows the mainstream media as a supporter of ARENA and the hegemonic position of the Pro-ARENA bloc.

On the other hand, the former guerrilla organization articulates a weaker network of radio-stations, regional TV-stations and publications. One of the most important is a pro-FMLN afternoon daily, *Diario Co Latino*. *Co Latino* is a faithful ally of the former guerrillas since the eighties. The newspaper has a daily circulation of 10,000 copies (Valle, 2008, p.19) and places a positively coverage of the left-wing party (Segura, 2001). Francisco Valencia,

director of *Co Latino*, is a former member of the insurgency, in which he played an important role in rebel propaganda unities (Vaquerano and Baires, 2008).

But the configuration of the two media groups does not obscure the existence of non-aligned outlets. One of them, the internet weekly *El Faro* raises the flag of trademark U.S. “watchdog” journalism as a response to the anti-objectivistic journalism of *Co Latino*^{xi} and the conservative orientation of mainstream newspapers such as *La Prensa Gráfica* and *Diario El Mundo*. With more than 60,000 subscribers^{xii}, *El Faro* constructs its identity in a consciously renunciation to be part of one of the two polarized blocs (Valencia 2009). A European Union’s content analysis about 2009 elections in El Salvador also reveals diversity in tones and spaces in the press. Nevertheless, *El Faro* and other “independent” outlets do not have the audiences, the scopes and the grade of organization and influence as the media clustered in the two polarized blocs.

As we mentioned before, we adapt the concept of “highly political parallelism” to the Salvadoran reality. Our thesis of two polarized media groups is detached from the market-oriented method of Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, in whose perspective ownership concentration and shares in the market play a fundamental role.

Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos restrict political parallelism to the political interplay among the biggest outlets in a national scale. The idea behind their theory is to use the model of ownership concentration to narrow the number of relevant actors in the media system. Hallin and Mancini utilizes the “development of media markets” as one of the four fundamental dimensions to compare European media systems, a dimension that influences directly the “political parallelism”, understood as the similarity between the architecture of the political and the media system. For example, Hallin and Mancini exemplify their models highlighting the newspapers readership in national markets. “Newspaper markets also vary in the balance of local, regional and national newspapers. Some are dominated by a national or super-regional press [...], some by local papers [...] and some have a combination of both [...]” (Hallin and Mancini 2004 p. 25).

The dimension of “development of media markets” suggests that actors in media systems should be measured according to their importance in the market. Consequently, it seems logic to focus on the ownership concentration as a valid criterion to understand a media system. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) utilize a similar method. They study “clientelism” in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico utilizing examples of big mainstream media such as the daily Colombian newspaper “El Tiempo” and the powerful television networks Televisa, in Mexico, and TV Globo, in Brazil.

In El Salvador, focusing only on strong media actors – as Hallin and Mancini and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos propose – mislead the understanding of a highly ideological and political polarized media system. Ownership approaches of political parallelism are useless as mainstream media are overwhelmed in favour of ARENA (Rockwell and Janus 2003, Janus 1999, Rockwell 2002, Darling 2007, Wolf 2007). Salvadoran leftist outlets are small in size, audience and scopes (Rockwell and Janus 2003). European left-wingers cannot be equated to Salvadoran outlets. In El Salvador, there are no left-wing newspapers – such as *El País* in Spain and *die tageszeitung* (TAZ) in Germany – which can be detected by their shares in the market. Against the background of these arguments we abandon the ownership method and work with the ideological scale of left versus right and with the historical political polarizing trend of Salvadoran media (López V. 1961, Rockwell and Janus 2003). We agree with Waisbord’s (2002) complains of the overestimation of ownership:

Ownership concentration is important. But it is not the whole story of the current situation in the region. First, media concentration in different political regimes (military authoritarianism and today’s “illiberal” democracies) has different consequences for public life. Second, even when property is highly concentrated, the media is not a vast anti-democratic wasteland. There are spaces for conflict and change. (Internet source)

Thus, any perspective that examines the Salvadoran media system taking only the ownership concentration into account is useless.

5. Conclusion

We have described the Salvadoran media system by illustrating its historical context, which is the key factor for understanding the current media landscape. The media still have to deal

with the legacy of the civil war: political polarization and the hegemony of a rich oligarchy. This polarized atmosphere is reflected in the Salvadoran media, which are mostly owned by parts of the conservative elite and supporters of ARENA. Thus, in the postwar era, the media in El Salvador has been dominated by the interests of the conservative party ARENA. In contrast, the influence and reach of leftist-oriented media has still been quite limited.

El Salvador's media system should be understood as a scenario in which two political and ideological forces meet (Pro-Arena and Pro-FMLN outlets). The concept of "political parallelism" and "clientelism" (Hallin and Mancini 2004) are usable tools to emphasize the political role of the media. However, we do not entirely agree with the method of selecting the media to analyse by the criteria of ownership concentration in which Hallin and Mancini selected the media to analyze like Hallin and Mancini do. In a context like the Salvadoran, only to focus on the leading media obscures the political relevance of other actors such as minor and small-scale media. Not only big media play a political role, more if the market has an overwhelmed biased in favour of a political force.

ⁱ Mayrene Zamora/Alexandra Bonilla: "Critican a Funes por trato hacia la prensa" (May 27th 2008). La Prensa Gráfica. <http://www.laprensagrafica.net/nacion/1067783.asp>

ⁱⁱ José Napoleon Duarte Fuentes, a Christian Democrat (Spanish acronym PDC), presidency from 1984-1988

ⁱⁱⁱ Alfredo Cristiani was president of El Salvador from 1989 to 1994.

^{iv} The calculation that *El Diario de Hoy*, *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario El Mundo* control the majority of the daily newspaper circulation is based on the numbers of Rockwell and Janus (2003) and Valle (2008).

^v Freedom House: El Salvador (2008):

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7388>

^{vi} Freedom House: El Salvador (2008):

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7388>

^{vii} Reporters without Borders: "Only peace protects freedoms in post-9/11 world" (Press freedom index 2008): http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=29031

^{viii} Reporters without Borders: Radio journalist murdered for unknown reasons (24.09.07): http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=23741

^{ix} Reporters without Borders: "Woman journalist's arrest on terrorism charge condemned as violation of constitution" (10.07.07): http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=22867

^x The term "third wave of democratization" was first used by Samuel Huntington (1991) to study the phenomenon of the flowering of liberal democracies after the collapse of the Socialist bloc and South European and Latin American dictatorships.

^{xi} Francisco Valencia, director of *Diario Co Latino*, interview, September 2008.

^{xii} Ibid.

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