Political Parallelism and Media Coalitions in Western Europe

Juan P. Artero

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Juan Pablo Artero, Visiting Fellow
Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford
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Abstract: Political parallelism between parties and media organisations has a long tradition in European history. But after the demise of the party press, this phenomenon is still present under new forms. One of them is the creation of media coalitions around the mainstream political parties that explicitly or implicitly support them in the political competition. That phenomenon is analysed regarding the last general elections of five Western European democracies: Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Italy. From a general perspective, no huge differences can be found among them in an overall political parallelism assessment. Data demonstrate that real differences among countries concerned are found in television, but not in the press, as newspapers are politically parallel everywhere. Finally, all mainstream centre-right and centre-left political parties have an identifiable media coalition around themselves that share their views. Moreover, it looks to be a "sine qua non" condition for a political party to win elections and become a dominant force.

Keywords: political parallelism, partisanship, media coalitions, Western Europe

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Short Biography: Dr Juan Pablo Artero is an Associate Professor of Journalism at University of Zaragoza, Spain. He attended a BA in Audiovisual Communication at University of Navarra (2001), a MSc in Management at City University London (2005) and a PhD in Communication at University of Navarra (2006). He has been a visiting fellow at the Institute for Media and Entertainment (2004) and Fordham University (2007), and at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (University of Oxford, 2014). Since then, Dr Artero has taught Media Management and Structure of Media Industries at University of Navarra and University of Zaragoza.

Contact details:

Dr Juan Pablo Artero Muñoz
School of Humanities, University of Zaragoza
Pedro Cerbuna, 12 50009 Zaragoza, Spain
Phone: +34605157551
Fax: +34976761506
E-mail: jpartero@unizar.es

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1. Introduction

Print and broadcast media outlets have frequently been regarded as independent, impartial and neutral providers of political information for citizens to make democratic decisions. However, the press development in Europe since the eighteenth century was fundamentally partisan. When modern political parties were shaped in the second half of the nineteenth century, many of them acquired or launched party organs that could support their views before the public opinion. That trend of media ownership by political parties came to an end almost everywhere in Western Europe during the second half of the twentieth century.

The end of the party press occurred jointly with the development of public service broadcasting in most countries. Both phenomena would suggest the advent of a new era of impartial journalism. But Western European democracies have followed a different path. Political competition has been paralleled with media competition. Citizens can access an increasing number of information sources from a wide variety of newspapers, broadcasting channels and news websites. But they usually contain editorial lines more close to particular political positions. Media pluralism is available in the market, but mostly from an external viewpoint, taking into account the media system as a whole.

This piece of research aims to analyse recent developments of political parallelism between parties and media organisations in Western Europe. In particular, it includes a comparison of how mainstream political parties in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain have forged media coalitions around themselves in their respective last general elections.

2. Theoretical framework

For Seymour-Ure (1974:173), a newspaper is defined as paralleling a party if is "closely linked to that party by organisation, loyalty to party goals and the partisanship of its readers". Consequently, a press system can be defined as paralleling a party system "when such links exist between each newspaper and a party" (173-4). Hence, complete parallelism exists "if every newspaper was linked extremely closely to one or another party on the three dimensions already explored; and when, in addition, the number of papers in the system was distributed between the parties in proportion to each party's strength" (174).

Blumler and Gurevitch (1975) preferred to use the concept of media partisanship. Later on, McQuail (1992:191) defined partisanship as "a systematic tendency to favour (in outcome) one side or position over another". It is a variant of news practice that claims its specific legitimacy besides objective or neutral media information. That variety contributes to diversity as it permits citizens' access to very different information sources. But partisanship is, in a sense, just one side of parallelism (the media organisation itself), not taking into account the audience side. In addition, partisanship is connected with the proper concept of media bias according to Brandenburg (2006).

Bias is the measurable manifestation of partisanship, whether it is exposed with more coverage, more unfiltered coverage or more positive coverage given to a particular party or candidate.

The proper concept of "political parallelism" was developed from those antecedents by Hallin and Mancini (2004:27) as "the degree to which the structure of the media system parallels that of the party system". Mancini (2012: 270) presented later a more specific definition, which is related "to the existence of organised, stable groups, and a tradition of articulated cultural debate in which competing opinions are well rooted". Political parallelism is also related to external pluralism (different views offered in a market by several media institutions) rather than internal pluralism (diversity is given inside each media outlet). Van Kempen (2007) also broadened the original concept coined by Seymour-Ure into media-party parallelism, taking into account both press and television news parallelism. However, the universal validity of the concept itself has been put into question by Albuquerque (2013), when defending that it can only be used when applied to a competitive political system with clear cleavages and when institutional stability is enough to identify recurrent patterns of interaction. Ciaglia (2013) also argues that media and politics frequently converge and overlap more than remain parallel.

For Seymour-Ure (1974: 159), the rationale behind political parallelism is that "the same social forces that find expression in the party or parties of a political system tend to find expression also through the press". He finds several reasons that explain connections between press and party systems: 1) Obvious historical associations; 2) The role of the press in the political systems connects it to parties; 3) The functions of parties are highly compatible with the capabilities of newspapers. Noam (1991) also found ideological parallelism to be a reasonable marketing decision, as far as media products have to differentiate themselves in highly competitive markets so as to attract audiences. Hallin (2009:333) agrees when recognising that it could be considered "a viable or even an essential" business strategy. In addition, early communication research highlighted many years ago the likeliness of audiences to select news media outlets that fit better with their own ideological views (Lazarsfeld et al.1944; Berelson et al. 1954).

What Seymour-Ure (1974) says in particular is that the connection between a paper and a party can be measured by reference to three characteristics of parties: organisation, goals and members and supporters. But to do so, newspapers must be treated as monoliths. The more evident connection is the management of a paper by a party. The other extreme would be no connection, but there are many possibilities in between. They are namely, ownership, affiliation, or informal association, for instance through the personal support of their proprietors, even if the paper has no organisational links with the party at all. Regarding party goals, there is again a wide range from papers showing extreme loyalty to others independent. Finally, for complete parallelism the paper's readership should not include supporters of any other party. But as the author acknowledges, this is unlikely to happen fully in the twentieth century, as far as people select papers for information and entertainment more than for specific political purposes. But at the same time, that connection is strong in the most partisan papers.

Hallin and Mancini (2004:307) identified similar elements of political parallelism. They propose that it can be found in the ownership of the news media, in media content and audiences. But they also highlight as a distinctive feature the journalistic orientation and

practices, such as the particular political affiliations of owners, managers and journalists. Allern and Blach-Ørsten (2011) differentiate between an organisational and ownership level and the proper level of news media content and ideological orientation. Regarding content parallelism, some authors (Tresch 2012) have highlighted the need to differentiate opinion and editorial content (where the media outlet acts as a political advocate) from news pages (where journalists inform the citizens in a balanced way). However, it is also important to remind that facts might be separated from opinions, but opinions also impact how facts are selected and framed.

How to measure political parallelism is one of the main challenges in order to study that phenomenon. According to Seymour-Ure (1974), if the number and strength of political parties is added to organisation, goals and membership, the combination of all four variables permits to range press/party parallelism (between none, low, medium, high and complete) according to the number of dimensions on which parallelism is high or low (0, 1, 2, 3 or 4). Blumler and Gurevitch (1975: 175) proposed five levels of media partisanship, ranging from party ownership, voluntary fixed partnerships, qualified support, ad hoc partisanship and disinterested independence. For them, that aspect is one out of four dimensions so as to explain relationship between media and political institutions, jointly with the degrees of state control, and of media–political elite integration, as well as the occupational values embraced by the members of media institutions.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain the connections between media and political systems according to four variables. Apart from political parallelism, they include development of media markets, journalistic professionalism and the state intervention in the media system. For them, political parallelism is high in Mediterranean / Polarised Pluralist media systems (like France, Italy or Spain), medium in North-Central European / Democratic Corporatist countries (such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries), and low in the North Atlantic / Liberal media systems (like Britain and the US).

Regarding the causes of political parallelism, Seymour-Ure proposes several hypotheses. The probability of that is greater in multi-party, well balanced, and stable party systems; those societies with deeper cleavages between ideologies; political parties that are imposed (as opposed to naturally developing ones); parties that are more centralised, less internally democratic, and lead by charismatic leaders; and the degree of parties' weight in the whole political system (1974: 184-200).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) include a wide range of reasons that explain political parallelism where it is given. It tends to be stronger in countries with powerful, polarised, multi-party political systems. The same holds true when the state intervention in the media is high, which leads to a lesser extent of commercialisation. Societies that organised themselves internally around pillarisation (vertical religious or ideological groups) favour also political parallelism in the media. Finally, countries that were more resistant to liberalisation and experienced late modernisation processes are more likely to maintain higher degrees of political parallelism. Other phenomena contributing to political parallelism include more proprietor control (Curran and Seaton 1997), a journalistic culture more oriented towards comments and policy-advocacy (Donsbach and Patterson 2004), a deeper level of cleavage voting (Van Kempen 2006) and a shorter distance between politicians and the media (Esser and D'Angelo 2006).

Regarding the effects of political parallelism, most of them are considered to be potentially negative for society as a whole. Negrine (1994) stated that it would facilitate a greater influence of political actors in journalistic content creation. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) highlighted the connection between parallelism and clientelism in many countries. From a positive point of view, it has also been found to encourage electoral participation by citizens (Van Kempen 2007). But citizens living in countries with higher levels of political parallelism also tend to be more selective in media content and tend to avoid cross-cutting exposure (Goldman and Mutz 2011). The journalists perceived to receive more political influences in their work in higher parallel contexts (Hanitzsch and Mellado 2011), but they also more likely to set frames under such circumstances (Brüggemann 2014). Vaccari (2011) also explains that parallel media involve more in online activism and campaigning, which promotes audience participation. The list of potentially negative consequences of political parallelism also includes social polarisation (Van Dalen et al. 2012), a higher political legitimacy gap (Lelkes 2013), and the promotion of extreme attitudes, less trust in leaders and parties and a preference for bipartisanship (Levendusky 2013). A brief summary of the main theoretical consideration concerning political parallelism and its different aspects, causes and effects can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical contributions on political parallelism

Causes	Aspects	Effects
- Multi-party, balanced, stable party systems - Deeper cleavages between ideologies - Imposed parties (as opposed to naturally developing ones) - Centralised, less internally democratic, charismatic parties - Weight of parties in the system (Seymour-Ure 1974)	Connection parties-papers by reference to three characteristics of parties: - Organisation - Goals - Members and supporters - Number of papers and parties within the system (Seymour-Ure 1974)	- More influence of political actors in content creation (Negrine 1994)
		- More clientelism (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002)
		- More electoral participation (Van Kempen 2007)
- More proprietor control (Curran and Seaton 1997)		- Selective / no cross-cutting exposure (Goldman and Mutz 2011)
- Comment and advocacy-oriented journalistic culture (Donsbach and Patterson 2004)		- More political influences on journalists (Hanitzsch and Mellado 2011)
- Powerful / Polarised / Multi-party political system - High state intervention / Less commercialisation - Pillarisation / Organised pluralism - Resistance to liberalisation / late modernisation (Hallin and Mancini 2004)	- Ownership of the news media - Readership patterns - Media contents - Journalistic practices and values (Hallin and Mancini 2004)	- More audience participation in the media's online campaigns (Vaccari 2011)
		- Social polarisation (Van Dalen et al. 2012)
		- Higher political legitimacy gap (Lelkes 2013)
- Level of cleavage voting (Van Kempen 2006)	- Organisational and ownership level - Level of news media content and ideological orientation (Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011)	- Moves citizens to extreme attitudes - Less trust in leaders and parties - Preference for bipartisanship (Levendusky 2013)
- Less distance between politicians and the media (Esser and D'Angelo 2006)		- More frame setting by journalists (Brüggemann 2014)

Source: cited publications.

3. Comparative studies on political parallelism

In his seminal book, Seymour-Ure (1974) concluded that the British national press was partisan only in a loose sense, as far as newspapers were independent organisationally and the readers' partisanship was very varied. However, he found the strongest partisanship on support of party goals by the press, even if that commitment was rarely total. After his 30-country study, no significant empirical research was conducted for almost two decades. However, political parallelism has received increasing attention from researchers in the last years. In this review, comparative research affecting Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain will be highlighted.

Patterson and Donsbach (1993) conducted a survey of journalists and found a high degree of political parallelism in Britain, Germany and Italy. Voltmer (2000) studied quantitative and content diversity of press and broadcasting outlets based on 1990 secondary data. From the number of suppliers' viewpoint, all five countries were low in press and high in TV diversity. But from a content perspective, Britain was labelled low in press and high in TV diversity; Germany, high in both aspects; and Italy and Spain, low in both elements.

After that study, the well-known book by Hallin and Mancini (2004) placed Britain under the liberal model (which includes low political parallelism), Germany on the democratic corporatist one (medium level) and France, Italy and Spain under a polarised pluralist system (which carries high level of political parallelism). The authors themselves stated that all three ideal models cannot be fitted equally in all particular countries, as it might be especially the case of the United Kingdom and France inside their general blocs.

Van Kempen (2007) used data from a 1999 audience survey to assess levels of political parallelism in at the time 15 EU member countries. Regarding the big five, she found that they were all above the European mean of 7.1 points with the clear exception of Germany. Britain and France share a similar degree while Spain and especially Italy were among the top countries. That study also highlighted the important differences between the press (mean 5.2) and television (mean 2.2). Overall, broadcasting was far less partisan than newspapers, with the exception of Italy. But for instance, the British evaluation discovered a fairly neutral television system, but also a very partisan newspaper industry.

Lucht and Udris (2010) calculated the circulation of the intermediary press (that owned by political or social institutions) between 1960 and 2005 in several countries. Britain was the first to reduce significantly party papers and similar publications: they accounted for around 5% of the circulation in 1960 and almost nothing by 1970. In France and Germany figures dropped down from around 18% and 9% respectively in 1960 to represent just around 2% of total circulation in 2005.

Goldman and Mutz (2011) applied audience survey data raised between 1992 and 1996 to evaluate political parallelism and other aspects in various countries. In their scale, press parallelism was high (around 14 points) in Britain and Italy and medium in Spain, while TV parallelism was found very low in the United Kingdom and Spain and very high in Italy.

Finally, Popescu et al. (2011) conducted an experts' survey (European Media Systems Survey) in which they included several questions concerning political parallelism. The overall assessment (if the operationalisation of bias plus policy advocacy is accepted as political parallelism) is that it is a widespread phenomenon in Italy and Spain, but also in France, Britain and Germany (in that order). In fact, all five countries are rated between 9.7 points (Germany) and 14.4 points (Italy), a not so wide statistical range in a 20-point scale. A summary of the previously commented findings is available below in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative studies on political parallelism in selected countries

Study (method)	Aspect/Year	Britain	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Seymour-Ure 1974		Low	Medium	Medium	n. a.	n. a.
Patterson and Donsbach 1993 (journalists' survey)		High	n. a.	High	High	n. a.
Voltmer 2000 (secondary data)	Press 1990	Low quantitative and low content diversity	n. a.	Low quantitative and high content diversity	Low quantitative and low content diversity	High quantitative and content diversity
	TV 1990	High quantitative and formal diversity	High quantitative and formal diversity	High quantitative and formal diversity	High quantitative and formal diversity	High quantitative and formal diversity
	Quantitative diversity 1990	Low press and high TV diversity	Low press and high TV diversity	Low press and high TV diversity	Low press and high TV diversity	Low press and high TV diversity
	Content diversity 1990	Low press and high TV diversity	n. a.	High press and high TV diversity	Low press and low TV diversity	Low press and low TV diversity
Hallin and Mancini 2004		Low	High	Medium	High	High
Van Kempen 2007 (audience survey)	Press 1999	6.9	5.4	0.7	7.2	8.0
	TV 1999	0.5	3.2	0.2	8.0	3.5
	Media 1999	7.1	7.5	1.0	14.4	10.5
Lucht and Udris 2010 (intermediary press circulation)	1960	Around 5%	Around 18%	Around 9%	n. a.	n. a.
	1970	0%	Around 12%	Around 5%	n. a.	n. a.
	1980	0%	Around 10%	Around 4%	n. a.	n. a.
	1990	0%	Around 8%	Around 2%	n. a.	n. a.
	2005	0%	Around 2%	Around 2%	n. a.	n. a.
Goldman and Mutz 2011 (audience surveys)	Press 1992-6	Around 14	n. a.	n. a.	Around 14	Around 5
	TV 1992-6	Around 0	n. a.	n. a.	Around 14	Around 2
Popescu et al. 2011	Newspapers-TV partisan	10.3	11.8	9.7	14.4	12.9

(experts' survey)	bias plus policy advocacy					
	Newspapers	15.2	12.0	11.5	12.4	14.4
	Public TV	4.8	8.7	7.6	16.0	9.3
	Private TV	4.3	13.9	7.9	17.0	12.7

Source: cited publications.

It is again important to consider that the overall parallelism of media markets as a whole do not say much about particular sectors. For instance, according to the mentioned survey, the press in the United Kingdom is the most partisan, while its television (both public service and private operators) is the most balanced of all five mentioned countries. France has a slightly more balanced press and a more partisan television, especially the private channels. Germany is marked better than France in all three sectors. The press in Italy is like everywhere, while TV channels are considerably more partisan. Spain has very partisan press and a more balanced public television. Generally talking, parallelism is considerably higher in print media than broadcasting, with the exception of Italy and to a lesser extent, Spain. And it can also be said that is a widespread phenomenon not only in those five countries, but also in others, especially some like Greece, Portugal or the Scandinavian nations.

The general framing of politics is shaped by factors like the political system, media system, journalistic norms and values, and strength and character of the party system (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006). The mainstream academic interpretation is that political parallelism is diminishing in most countries due to factors like commercialisation, the spread of US journalistic culture or de-politicisation of society at large. According to Voltmer (2000), media political balance in most western countries improved between 1970 and 1990, tough Britain and Italy showed a dominant rightist orientation and a decline of diversity took place in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. Deacon et al. (2001:109) argue that Britain has experienced various trends in press alignment: weakening ties between parties and the media after the war; a polarised realignment in the 1970s and 1980s; and a process of de-alignment in the 1990s. Deacon et al. (1998:148) identify a "hollow-centred partisanship" after the New Labour movements towards the media. In the same line, Seymour-Ure (1998) speaks about an "unhinged press", with more internal pluralism in the quality papers and a certain detachment of the traditional Tory press. Bayram (2013) finds that in post-war Britain partisan content has declined, but partishanship as reflected in the readers' party preferences has slightly increased. Koss (1984) argued that the party attachments of newspapers were abandoned by 1947 and they became less partisan. Curran and Seaton (1997) defend the existence of ups and downs, not a single trend. Bayram's research confirms this position, though the general trend comparing post-war times with nowadays goes effectively to less parallelism.

Van Kempen (2006) explains that decrease of attachments to political parties in a context in which party identification is in decline and voter preferences change more over time. Furthermore, newspapers tend to adopt a more balanced and neutral reporting, which lead to less partisan political debates. Objective reporting standards tend to reduce party attachment on media content. In addition, newspapers tend to soften ideological issues so at to appeal to broad audiences (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The same thing holds true for television, which from its very beginning as a public service, tried to engage all audiences, resulting in a low politicisation. That panorama

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has not changed much since the appearance of new commercial channels. As a consequence or all these phenomena, political parallelism is diminishing. Luch and Linards (2010) speak about a process of "disembedding" of the press in the last decades, now that newspapers have separated themselves from their former intermediaries (political parties, religious denominations, civic associations) and have mostly become commercial enterprises. In that sense, global journalism would be converging towards a liberal model, mostly represented by the US.

Hallin (2009) acknowledges the convergence trend in global journalism and media markets. American journalistic conventions have been imitated everywhere, commercialisation is increasing in the media and alternative media (such as it was the party press in Europe) is declining. Globally, the role of the state is reducing and it leads to a more market-oriented media environment. As a result, the differences among media systems in Western Europe are less nowadays than in the 1970s. But Hallin also states that that convergent force has limits, giving examples like the resistant partisanship in Southern Europe and the increasing trend towards it in radio, cable television and the Internet even in countries like the US. So that convergence goes in both ways, given that the liberal model spreads around the world but it also changes internally.

Bayram (2010) states that the general trend in most studies is towards decreasing political parallelism. The main reason behind that would be that partisanship is not profitable for media businesses. But in that authors' view, commercialisation does not necessarily means a neutral non-partisan media. Differentiation theory (social functions initially fused are separated, politics from communication in this case) implies that when the media differentiate themselves from politics, they do not parallel the party system. In the same sense, modernisation would lead to less political parallelism, but that is not taking place in many cases, as it shows the example of Turkey.

Allern and Blach-Ørsten (2011) also defend a critical position against the commercialisation and consequent non-parallelism thesis. In the Scandinavian countries "three coexistences" take place: commercial media and media tied to political and social groups; political parallelism and journalistic professionalism; and traditions of liberal press freedom and strong state intervention. According to these authors, commercialisation is not reducing in fact political parallelism. It is true that it is disappearing at the organisational level, but political ideologies are now more apparent in news content that in the past. Even most newspapers still include political labels like conservative, liberal or social democratic in their mission statements or statutes.

Political parallelism is also rooted in diverse traditions of journalism practice. A recent content analysis by Esser and Umbricht (2013) confirmed that different journalistic cultures remain. They research the existence of three main approaches to political journalism: rational news analysis (US); polarised reporting (Italy); and dissemination of news and views (Germany). French and British newspapers combine elements from different traditions, but the United Kingdom is clearly more rooted in the continental European tradition than in the American one. Benson (2010) defines the French journalistic culture as the "debate ensemble", which shows critical opposing viewpoints, in contrast with the US "dramatic narrative". Esser and Umbricht (2014) also reject the idea that a simple Americanisation of reporting styles has taken place between the 1960s and the 2000s. Even if the US journalistic conventions (such as factualness, balance, or critical professionalism) have spread in Europe, it is also true that American

newspapers have moved to a more opinion-oriented approach in line with the European tradition. In general, all Western countries have moved towards a more autonomous and interpretative profile of the political journalist.

Ciaglia (2013) states that new forms of parallelism are taking place nowadays, such as the politicisation of public service broadcasting (as far as politicians appoint management and controlling boards) and the inclusion of media practitioners in political positions, with significant number of journalists seating in national parliaments. In fact, even in generally considered to be balanced public service broadcasting, Humphreys (1996) identified four models, which can be more or less matched with leading countries: government (France), professional (United Kingdom), proportional (Italy) and civic (Germany). In three of these models a significant participation of political and social groups in decision-making processes occurs.

One of the relatively new forms of political parallelism in Europe is the configuration of media coalitions around political parties. A media coalition can be defined as the assortment of media outlets explicitly or implicitly supporting a particular political party, candidate or ideology. Once the party press era is over, this connection is no more organisational, but very much based on explicit endorsements or implicit alignment of the editorial line of media firms and a political party's policy. These coalitions rely on common interests for both sides: parties and the media are equally interested in reaching significant audiences for their messages. In addition, media support can also be rewarded with clientelistic policy decisions once the party is in office.

4. Media coalitions by country

This section includes an overview of the media coalitions established in the big five Western European democracies in their last general elections. Data regarding media support for a particular political party comes mainly from the European Media Systems Survey 2010. In that study, experts were asked to respond to the following question: "Which party each media agrees with most often?" The answers had to be applied to a list of the main media outlets at each country. That information is also put into relation with the vote percentage obtained by political parties in the last general election (Table 3).

Table 3. Vote percentage (and seats) in last general elections

Party/Coalition	Britain 2010	France 2012	Germany 2013	Italy 2013	Spain 2011
Centre-right	36.1% (307)	34.6% (229)	45.3% (311)	29.1% (124)	44.6% (186)
Centre-left	29.0% (258)	39.8% (331)	29.4% (193)	29.5% (340)	28.8% (110)
Liberals	23.0% (57)	-	2.4% (0)	10.5% (45)	4.7% (5)
Left	-	6.9% (0)	8.2% (64)	-	6.9% (11)
Greens	0.9% (1)	-	7.3% (63)	-	0.8% (1)
Populist	3.1% (0)	13.6% (0)	-	25.5% (108)	-

Source: Wikipedia. Shown vote percentages correspond to France's coalitions in the first round, Germany's constituency vote and Italy's coalitions. Only parties reaching 5% of the vote are listed.

Table 3 show that the big five Western European countries have adopted to a certain extent a political structure system of two mainstream parties (centre-right and centre-left) that reach around 30-45% of the vote each. In addition, another two medium-sized parties challenge them, but here there are also important differences. For instance, the third party was significantly bigger in Britain (Lib Dems) and Italy (Five Star

Movement), keeping the fourth one much smaller (UKIP and centrists, respectively). In France, Germany and Spain the third and fourth parties are considerably smaller than the two dominant political factions. This piece of research argues that distinctive media coalitions can be clearly identified for the two mainstream political parties in each nation, but not among the others. The shown percentage after each media outlet, below, expresses the surveyed experts' opinion about how much that newspaper or TV channel agrees with positions of a given political party. Furthermore, other media firms not analysed in the European Media System Survey will be included, but only nation-wide outlets will be considered.

In Britain, the Conservative Party won the 2010 general election with 36% of the turnout. The media coalition supporting that option included quality newspapers The *Daily Telegraph* (90%) and *The Times* (80%); popular paper The *Sun* (90%); and certain support from TV channels ITV (30%) and Channel 5 (20%). In addition, midmarket papers *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* endorsed the Conservatives. Reference business daily *Financial Times* and news magazines *The Economist* and The *Spectator* also endorsed David Cameron's candidacy. Consequently, media conglomerates supporting the conservatives were News Corporation (*The Times* and The *Sun*), Telegraph Media Group, Northern and Shell (including *Daily Express* and Channel 5, though the *Daily Star* remained uncommitted), Pearson (*Financial Times* and *The Economist*) and DMGT (including the *Daily Mail* and some interest in ITV News).

On the other side, the Labour media coalition was significantly reduced at the 2010 elections. After 13 years in government, Gordon Brown just got 29% of the vote. He was officially endorsed only by the *Daily Mirror* and partially by The *Independent*. Comparing to 2005 elections, this option lost the support of media groups News International and Pearson. Apart from that, experts consider that some media outlets that often agree with the Labour Party include The *Guardian* (60%), BBC 1 (25%) and Channel 4 (25%). Additionally, news magazines The *New Statesman* and *Tribune* also implicitly back Labour's policies. The Liberal Democrats had an encouraging result in the 2010 elections: 23% of the turnout. As a result of that, their leader Nick Clegg became deputy prime minister in the coalition government with the Conservatives. They were endorsed by leading centre-left quality paper The *Guardian* and partially by The *Independent*. But in addition, experts consider that they received some support from The *Guardian* (30%) and TV networks Channel 4 (20%), BBC 2 (15%) and BBC 1 (10%).

In France, Francoise Hollande was elected President in 2012. In the following parliamentary elections, the Socialist Party's coalition obtained 39% of the vote in the first round. According to experts, the closest media outlets to that political option are newspapers *Libération* (50%) and *Le Monde* (40%) and public service TV channels France 2, France 3 and France 5 (all around 25%). News magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* is also a reference for the left in France. And communist heritage newspaper *L'Humanité* indirectly supports the socialists apart from more radical options. The Greens are included in the PS-led coalition and are acknowledged to receive some media support also from *Libération* (10%) and France 5 (10%). On the other hand, centre-right party UMP's coalition got 34% of the turnout. It is generally supported by quality newspaper *Le Figaro* (60%) and private TV channels TF1 (50%) and M6 (25%). In addition, some newspapers like *Ouest France* and catholic *La Croix*

are also close to Sarkozy's party, as well as business daily *Les Échos*. News magazines *L'Express* and *Le Point* also stand for a centre-right viewpoint.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel was re-elected after the 2013 elections with 45% of the constituency vote. Her party CDU (jointly with its Bavarian ally, CSU) has dominated post-war German politics. The media coalition traditionally supporting the Christian Democrats include newspapers *Die Welt* (75%), *Bild* (75%) and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (75%); as well as TV networks ZDF (50%), Sat 1 (40%) and ProSieben (30%). Other close print media outlets include generalist *Der Taggespiegel*, business daily *Handelsblatt* and the news magazine *Focus*. The liberal party FDP was supposed to obtain certain media support from *Die Welt* (10%) and *ProSieben* (10%), but after the last election are out of the Bundestag.

The social-democratic party SPD just obtained 29% of the turnout and joined Merkel's CDU to form a "grosse koalition" government. Its media support comes from the reference centre-left newspaper *Süddeustche Zeitung* (70%) and public service TV channel ARD (50%). Other print media with social-democratic views are dailies *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Die Tageszeitung*; weekly paper *Die Zeit*; and news magazines *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*.

In Italy, the centre-left PD-led coalition won the 2013 elections with a narrow difference over centre-right PDL's coalition. They both got 29% of the vote, but were closely followed by populist Five Star Movement (25%). PD is supported by newspapers *La Repubblica* (90%) and *La Stampa* (25%); TV channel RAI Tre (90%); news magazine *L'Espresso*; and its traditional party paper *L'Unitá*.

On the other side, PDL's media coalition includes, according to experts, newspapers *Il Giornale* (90%) and *Corriere della Sera* (45%); public service channels RAI Uno (80%) and RAI Due (70%); and private networks Italia 1 (90%) and Canale 5 (85%). Both are owned by Mediaset, the former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's company, which also includes Rette 4. Business daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* and news magazine *Panorama* also tend to back centre-right positions. The Christian Democrat party UDC is also receiving some media support from *Corriere della Sera* (20%) and *La Stampa* (20%), but its centrist-liberal coalition just got 10% of the vote in 2013. The same thing holds true with far-right PDL's ally Northern League and RAI Due (10%).

In Spain, Mariano Rajoy got an overwhelming victory for centre-right People's Party in 2011 (44% of the turnout). The media coalition supporting PP includes newspapers *ABC* (90%) and *El Mundo* (80%); and private channels Antena 3 (85%) and Telecinco (25%), to a lesser extent. Conservative daily *La Razón* and business paper *Expansión* also back PP, alongside with radio stations Cadena Cope and Onda Cero. News magazines are not politically significant in Spain, but its opinion-forming function is in a sense played in by talk radio. Social-liberal party UPyD (barely 5% of the vote) got some media support from *El Mundo* (10%). Socialist PSOE only obtained 28% of the vote, but it still maintained a media coalition lead by newspapers *El País* (90%) and *El Periódico* (85%); public TV channels TVE 1 (75%) and TVE 2 (65%); and private broadcasters Cuatro (90%) and Telecinco (50%). Other outlets with a centre-felt editorial position include TV network La Sexta and leading radio station Cadena Ser. Concerning media groups, they are clearly positioned in Spain: Prisa and Zeta are traditionally with PSOE and Planeta, Unedisa and Vocento generally support PP.

Identified media coalitions in all five countries are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Media coalitions in selected countries

Coalition	Britain	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Centre-right	Daily Telegraph (90%) The Times (80%) The Sun (90%) ITV (30%) Channel 5 (20%) Daily Express Daily Mail Financial Times The Economist The Spectator	Le Figaro (60%) TF1 (50%) M6 (25%) Ouest France La Croix Les Échos L'Express Le Point	Die Welt (75%) Bild (75%) Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (75%) ZDF (50%) Sat 1 (40%) ProSieben (30%) Der Taggespiegel Handelsblatt Focus	Il Giornale (90%) Corriere della Sera (45%) RAI Uno (80%) RAI Due (70%) Italia 1 (90%) Canale 5 (85%) Rette 4 Il Sole 24 Ore Panorama	ABC (90%) El Mundo (80%) Antena 3 (85%) La Razón Expansión Cadena Cope Onda Cero
Centre-left	The Guardian (60%) BBC 1 (25%) Channel 4 (25%) Daily Mirror The Independent The New Statesman Tribune	Libération (50%) Le Monde (40%) France 2 (25%) France 3 (25%) France 5 (25%) Le Nouvel Observateur L'Humanité	Süddeustche Zeitung (70%) ARD (50%) Frankfurter Rundschau Die Tageszeitung Die Zeit Der Spiegel Stern	La Repubblica (90%) La Stampa (25%) RAI Tre (90%) L'Espresso L'Unitá	El País (90%) El Periódico (85%) TVE 1 (75%) TVE 2 (65%) Cuatro (90%) Telecinco (50%) La Sexta Cadena Ser
Divided media outlets	The Guardian (L 60%, LD 30%) BBC 1 (L 25%, C 10%, LD 10%) BBC 2 (LD 15%, L 10%) Channel 4 (L 25%, LD 20%)	Le Parisien - Aujourd'hui en France (several parties) France 5 (PS 25%, EE 10%)	ProSieben (CDU 30%, SPD 10%, FDP 10%) RTL (CDU 20%, SPD 20%)	Corriere della Sera (PDL 45%, UDC 20%) La Stampa (PD 25%, UDC 20%, PDL 15%)	Telecinco (PSOE 50%, PP 25%).

Source: European Media Systems Survey 2010.

Table 4 shows that all five countries maintain significant media coalitions around their respective centre-right and centre-left mainstream political parties. In all cases, most national print and broadcast media cluster around the two dominant political forces. On the other hand, smaller parties get substantially reduced stakes of political influence on the media. But some challenging parties became bigger with a certain amount of media support (as it was the case of the Lib Dems in Britain), while others are getting to that point without significant media coalitions around themselves (as it looks to be the case of populists UKIP in Britain, the National Front in France and the Five Star Movement in Italy).

Media groups' support is clearly identifiable in Britain and Spain, though not that much in the other countries, where the structure of media industries and cross-ownership is more diversified. But this is not to say that all media firms are clearly positioned. In

fact, some divided outlets can be found in all countries. In Britain, The *Guardian* looks to share support between the Labour and the Liberal Democrats. BBC channels and Channel 4 are also shared between these two parties and the Conservatives to a lesser extent. So that public service broadcasting looks to be impartial in Britain, in clear contrast with the newspaper industry. In France, *Le Parisien* is not clearly positioned and France 5 is close to the Socialist and the Greens to a lesser extent. In Germany, private channels ProSieben and RTL tend to be close to CDU, SPD and even FDP. In Italy, television is widely partisan, while two newspapers are more balanced between PD, PDL and UDC: especially *La Stampa*, along with *Corriere della Sera*. In Spain, the two main parties dispute influence over private channel Telecinco, while the rest of media conglomerates are clearly positioned.

5. Conclusions

This paper looks at the wider phenomenon of political parallelism in the big five Western European countries. From a general perspective, no huge differences can be found among themselves in an overall assessment. Germany, Britain, France, Spain and Italy (from less to more degree of political parallelism) all cluster in a narrow difference between 9.7 and 14.4 points out of 20. That consideration challenges conventional wisdom about essential differences regarding political parallelism within European media systems. But it also shows some consistent trends with other studies: Germany and Italy represent the poles, but Britain, France and Britain share a very similar degree of political parallelism.

Looked at by sector, the press tend to be more politicised than television, as other previous studied demonstrated. But the overall political parallelism assessment is even narrower among different newspaper markets: just between 11.5 points in Germany and 15.2 points in the United Kingdom. Public TV also tends to be less parallel than private channels, but it is highly politicised in Italy. On the other hand, private TV has significant levels of political parallelism in Italy, France and Spain. Ironically, Britain has at the same time the most politicised press and the most impartial television system. Data demonstrate that real differences among countries concerning political parallelism are found in television, but not in the press, as newspapers are politically parallel everywhere. Moreover, television as an industry goes well beyond political content, as far as its basic emphasis is put on entertainment, not journalism.

With respect to political parties, all mainstream centre-right and centre-left forces have an identifiable media coalition around themselves that support their views. Moreover, it looks to be a "sine qua non" condition for a political party to win elections and become a dominant force. Both mainstream parties and media outlets have incentives to such alliances: they usually serve to similar social groups, are interested in obtaining large audiences for their messages, and usually share editorial and policy positions. For nation-wide media is probably the most reasonable way to segment the market. In addition, a certain exchange is given sometimes: media provide quantitative and positive coverage to parties; and parties provide favourable policy decisions when they are in government. Media coalitions are also more common around big political parties since media outlets are more interested in politicians that can actually get to power and reach wider audiences supporting mainstream viewpoints.

At least three other points deserve being briefly discussed: challenging parties, divided media outlets and the Internet. In some countries, populist parties look to become bigger without supporting media coalitions. But this does not imply that they are not getting media coverage: in fact, radical proposals from such parties frequently receive considerable attention from all kinds of media outlets. That could be enough so as to reach certain vote levels (between 10 and 25%, for instance) in particular elections. But becoming a dominant political party able to win elections over significant periods of time probably requires the consolidation of a new media coalition. This is always possible as media coalitions have both almost permanent elements as well as other more switching components.

National media outlets tend to be organised around two wide media coalitions. Local and regional firms usually do not take part in that reality, as far as their market segmentation is more geographic than political. But also other national media firms avoid the political polarisation. These divided media still embrace the editorial standard of impartiality as an important feature. But most European journalistic cultures are not that close to objective, neutral reporting. An essential question for the future is how the Internet can affect that. Young audiences are moving to digital environments and political parallelism has barely been researched regarding the digital media. Some argue that the Internet can represent a renewal for factual, impartial news. But others state that it is an even more proper field for partisanship. Anyway, it looks like political parallelism and media coalitions in legacy and new media will keep being a relevant issue in contemporary democracies.

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