

# *El Mercurio* Lies, and *La Tercera* Lies More. Political Bias in Newspaper Headlines in Chile, 1994–2010

PATRICIO NAVIA

*Universidad Diego Portales, Chile*

RODRIGO OSORIO

*Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Chile*

---

In this article we examine the presence of bias in Chile's two main daily newspapers, *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*, both of which have historically been associated with the political right. We analyse their principal headlines in the first 100 days of rule of presidents Eduardo Frei (1994–2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006), Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010) and Sebastián Piñera (2010–2014). We find that *La Tercera* was more critical of all these presidents than *El Mercurio*. In *La Tercera* we also identify an ideological bias in favour of Piñera as compared to the centre-left presidents, and in *El Mercurio* a greater bias against Bachelet than the other presidents.

Keywords: Chile, gender bias, headlines, newspapers, political bias.

On 11 August 1967, a group of students demonstrating in a demand for educational reform at Chile's Catholic University surprised onlookers by unfurling a banner that read '*Chileno: El Mercurio miente*' (Chilean: *El Mercurio* lies). Those words had a deep impact in the context of the prevailing view among the elite that *El Mercurio* represented the political interests of the right and opposed the changes being implemented by the reformist government of Eduardo Frei (1964–1970). Subsequently, *El Mercurio*'s open opposition to the government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973) fuelled charges that it was a conservative voice, and its support for the dictatorship (1973–1990) confirmed its position as a right-wing newspaper. After democracy was restored, the governments of the centre-left Concertación coalition (1990–2010) felt they lacked representation in the print media, dominated by *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*. The idea that these newspapers represent the right persists today.

In this article we examine the presence of political and gender bias in the print media in Chile between 1994 and 2010. We analyse the headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* during the first 100 days of the governments of Eduardo Frei (1994–2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006), Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010) and Sebastián Piñera

(2010–2014). We investigate the existence of ideological bias in favour of centre-right Piñera, of the Alianza coalition, as compared to the three Concertación presidents. In addition, we assess the presence of gender bias in coverage of Bachelet's honeymoon period, as compared to those of the other three presidents.

After a theoretical review of the media's importance in democracy and the relationship between bias and the way in which news is reported, we explain our procedure for assessing the existence of ideological and gender bias. We show that, although there is evidence of ideological bias in both newspapers in favour of Piñera as compared to the other three presidents, this is less in *El Mercurio* than in *La Tercera*; there is, however, greater gender bias against Bachelet in the former. Finally, using a statistical model and controlling for differences in the issues addressed in the two newspapers' headlines, we show that in *La Tercera* there is bias in favour of Piñera, and that *El Mercurio* is less favourable towards Bachelet.

## Bias in the Media

Information provided by the media influences the way in which citizens form their opinions on political issues (Page, 1996; Jones, 2009; Jacobs and Shapiro, 2011). It affects how they vote, their political and public policy preferences and their evaluation of the government (Jordan, 1993; Graber, 2001, 2003; Kahn and Kenney, 2002; Druckman and Parkin, 2005). Media consumption explains the direction or intensity of their political opinions, either because they consume media that reinforce their leanings or because they take political positions on the basis of the information they receive from the media (Zaller, 1992; Graber, 2003).

Our cognitive schemata are related to the content of the media and the way it is presented (Roessler, 1999). Three elements have an important bearing on the construction of these schemata: agenda setting, framing and priming. Agenda setting is the process of 'mutual influence between the media and audience perceptions of what the important issues in public life are', while framing refers to 'the patterns of interpretation which are prevalent in media coverage and in people's minds and emphasise certain aspects of reality while ignoring others' and priming is 'the process in which dominant aspects of media coverage serve as criteria for individual decision making' (Roessler, 2008: 205).

The concept of agenda setting, which can be analysed quantitatively, is related to the news that is covered, the frequency with which it is covered and the effect this coverage has on people's perceptions and public debate. It also involves the way in which public debate influences what is published (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Weaver et al., 1981). Framing is also related to how coverage of an issue is shaped, the approach adopted, the way in which it is presented and the character it acquires in both the media and people's minds (Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Priming refers to the way in which the importance the media and people give to an item of news influences their decisions (Jacobs and Shapiro, 1994). Some authors understand framing, priming and agenda setting as equivalent processes and prefer to refer to them all as framing (Chong and Druckman, 2011: 173).

Framing, priming and agenda setting may be connected to the existence of news slant or bias (Entman, 2007). Content analyses have shown that the media sometimes present information in a biased way (Entman, 2007; Brown and Gitlin, 2011). This bias may reflect the media's ideological leanings (Jordan, 1993; Druckman, 2005). Different

studies have measured both the presence of ideological bias (Bartels, 1993; Jordan, 1993; Kahn and Kenney, 2002; Barrett and Barrington, 2005; Druckman and Parkin, 2005) and the proper way to measure it (Bartels, 1993; Groseclose and Milyo, 2005; Baron, 2006). When correctly measured, bias in media coverage does, under certain circumstances, explain changes in voters' preferences (Bartels, 1993).

Bias has been measured in different ways. References in the news media to think-tanks or related people have been measured (Jordan, 1993). It has also been measured in their selection of photographs (Barrett and Barrington, 2005) as well as in the content of leaders (Geer and Kahn, 1993; Kahn and Kenney, 2002; Druckman and Parkin, 2005) and of news content (Druckman and Parkin, 2005). Other studies have looked at the presence of political bias in the headlines of television news programmes (Weatherly et al., 2007) and of newspapers (Geer and Kahn, 1993; Gans and Leigh, 2012). Bias may also be reflected in the differing treatment the media give to news depending on the personal characteristics of those involved, such as race or gender (Lundman, 2003). Some studies have detected gender bias in US media coverage of legislative and state elections (Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1994; Kahn and Fridkin, 1996; Miller, 2001). These differences tend to reflect and reproduce existing gender inequalities and the society's prevailing stereotypes (Valenzuela and Correa, 2009).

In studying bias in the media, Gans and Leigh (2012) coded the headlines of the political sections of Australian newspapers on a five-level scale of bias, one of which being neutral, with two favourable to each political coalition. Druckman and Parkin (2005) coded newspaper editorials into three categories – positive, neutral and negative – in order to assess ideological bias and its impact on voter choice.

## Measuring Bias

Different authors have asserted that *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* are biased in favour of the right (Moulián, 1997; Mönckeberg, 2009; Salazar, 2010; Mayol, 2012). However, academic studies have only shown the existence of right-wing bias during presidential races (Porath, 2009) or at the start of a government's term (Navia et al., 2013). We provide information additional to that presented by Navia et al. (2013) by analysing both the presence of bias and the relationship between the two newspapers' headlines and the presence of political and gender bias.

We confined our analysis to the first 100 days – the so-called honeymoon period – of the four presidential periods between 1994 and 2010. We excluded the first government after the restoration of democracy (Patricio Aylwin, 1990–1994) due to the difficulties implicit in the transition process and because our objective was to analyse bias towards governments, not as regards the establishment of a new democratic regime. Three of these governments were centre-left and one was right-wing. Only one was led by a woman. We opted to use the first 100 days because it is at the beginning of their terms that presidents seek to transform campaign promises into the presentation of bills to Congress (Alemán and Navia, 2009), and because the press pays greater attention to political news at the start of a government (Hughes, 1995).

We analysed the main front-page headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* during the first 101 days of each government. Since governments in Chile take office on 11 March and no newspapers are published on 1 May, this implied taking the period from 11 March to 19 June of the first year of each government. Eight people coded these

headlines independently. The coders – all political science students at Diego Portales University – received training in a workshop that included a brief theoretical discussion of the media's role in forming political attitudes and opinions. Students were instructed in the criteria for coding each newspaper's main headline. Examples of both a negative and positive bias were discussed. In the case of the former, we used a headline from *La Tercera* on 17 March 2006 which read 'Government anticipates higher electricity bills in coming years', while for the latter we took an example from *El Mercurio* on 16 March 1994 which read 'Executive requests urgent passage of 21 social projects'.

*El Mercurio*'s main headline on 15 April 1994 – 'Government launches privatisation programme' – was used as an example to which a bias of 0 should be assigned, since privatisations can be viewed as positive or negative depending on readers' ideological position. The headline in *El Mercurio* on 18 April 2000 – 'Economy grew 5.6 percent in February' – was classified as having a positive bias, while its headline on 30 May 2006 – 'Maximum tension for mass student strike' – was classified as having a negative bias.

The eight students were instructed to code positive, negative and neutral headlines with values of 1, -1 and 0, respectively. It was emphasised that their evaluation should reflect whether a headline was positive or negative only as regards the government. Although there is evidence that the Chilean press reproduces the gender stereotypes, and therefore inequalities, prevalent in Chilean society (Valenzuela and Correa, 2009), we did not seek a priori to detect gender bias, nor certainly political bias, in favour of the right or the left. We sought only to identify the presence of bias. It was on the basis of subsequent analysis of the bias accumulated during the four honeymoon periods that we assessed whether this bias could be related to political or gender factors.

The coders were also provided with a list of possible categories of the issue referred to in the headlines. The resulting database (available on request) with 6400 codings was subjected to review and random validation. We then calculated an average coding for the headlines of each newspaper, giving each coder the same weight. As a result, the database used for analysis comprised 800 observations, 400 for each newspaper. We report the average accumulated bias during the first 100 days of each government, using accumulated bias because there were days with positive headlines and others with negative headlines, and it is more important to evaluate trends rather than anecdotal cases.

By classifying the headlines of both newspapers, we were able to capture both their different emphasis and their different treatment of the same news item. They often led with different items but, when leading with the same one, could well give it a different slant. For example, on 3 December 2013 (in a period not covered by this study), *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* both led with the results of the Pisa test (a standardised international test that measures the quality of education), but whereas the headline in *La Tercera* was 'Pisa test reveals scant progress in Chilean education on reading and maths', *El Mercurio* opted for 'Chile leads Latin America for first time on language, science and maths in OECD test'.

Since we were also analysing the content of the headlines, we coded the issues referred to in the main headline of each newspaper into five categories: domestic politics, international politics, economy, other domestic (non-political) issues and other issues (including international and social issues and sports). Although both newspapers have more than one headline on their front page – and *El Mercurio* uses the larger broadsheet format, with more space for headlines – we only coded the main headline.

## **Bias in the Chilean Press**

Since the restoration of democracy in 1990, the media have played a key role in Chile's democratic evolution (Tironi and Sunkel, 1993; Marín and Cordero, 2009). Today, the mass media are the principal vehicle for the communication of information and the expression of public debate (Marín and Cordero, 2009: 275). The mass media market still tends to be homogeneous in its ideological and cultural leanings (Couso, 2011), with negative impacts on a public sphere that seeks to foster democratic debate (Marín and Cordero, 2009: 275).

The print media have historically had ties with the right (Portales, 2000; Sunkel and Geoffroy, 2001; Correa Sutil, 2005; Dussaillant, 2005) and their evolution has been influenced by the legacy of authoritarianism (Tironi and Sunkel, 1993; Dermota, 2002). Under the dictatorship, the left-wing media were persecuted while those sympathetic to the regime were privileged. After the return of democracy, the media that had opposed the dictatorship experienced notable difficulties in consolidating their position (Mönckeberg, 2009).

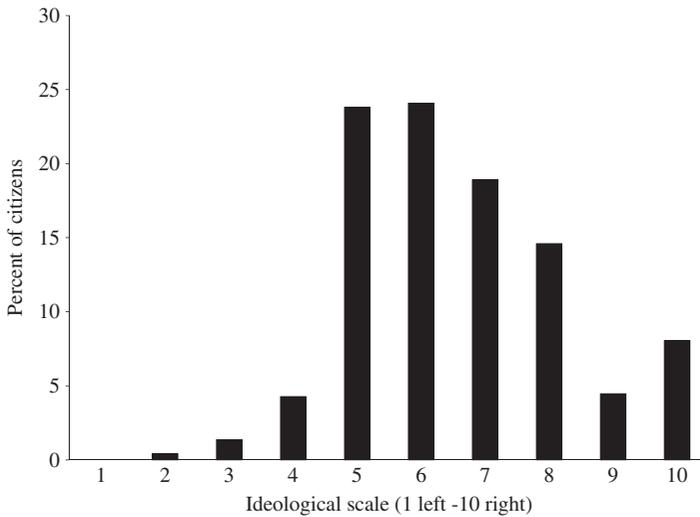
During these two decades of democracy, El Mercurio SAP and Consorcio Periodístico de Chile (Copesa) have dominated the print media market. The former company owns the *El Mercurio*, *Las Últimas Noticias* and *La Segunda* newspapers, as well as various regional papers, while Copesa owns *La Tercera*, *La Cuarta*, *Pulso* and some free newspapers. In 2013, *El Mercurio* was the second most read newspaper on weekdays and the most read on Saturdays and Sundays. *La Tercera* has the fourth highest sales on weekdays and the second highest at weekends, when newspaper readership is highest (ACHAP, 2013). The newspaper with the highest sales during the week is the popular *La Cuarta*, which gives less coverage to economic and political issues.

*El Mercurio* has played an important role in Chile's recent political history (Soto, 2003; Correa Sutil, 2005; Herrero, 2014) and its relationship with the right has been the subject of numerous studies (Dermota, 2002; Soto, 2003; Lagos, 2009; Mönckeberg, 2009). Its owner, Agustín Edwards, supported the military coup, collaborating with the CIA to destabilise the Allende government (González, 2000; Herrero, 2014). *El Mercurio* actively supported the Pinochet dictatorship and promoted implementation of the neoliberal economic model (Dermota, 2002; Correa Sutil, 2005; Mönckeberg, 2009).

*La Tercera* was founded in 1950 by the Picó Cañas family and initially targeted a popular audience (Sunkel, 1985). After the economic crisis of 1982, Copesa, like *El Mercurio*, experienced financial problems, but was rescued by the military government and was acquired by a business group that emerged during the dictatorship (Fazio, 1997; Mönckeberg, 2009). In 1991, businesspeople close to the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), a right-wing party loyal to Pinochet and defenders of the neoliberal model, joined Copesa (Mönckeberg, 2009). Since the end of the 1990s, Álvaro Saieh, a businessman who was also part of the military government's group of neoliberal economists, has been its main controller.

The consolidation of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* as the dominant media occurred together with Chile's transition to democracy. According to some critics, the media system subordinated itself to market dynamics, reproducing the privatisation and internationalisation processes that prevailed in other areas of the economy (Tironi and Sunkel, 1993, 2000; Bresnahan, 2003). Television channels tend to shy away from political issues and, although television is Chileans' main source of information, its influence over the political agenda is therefore less than that of the print media (Valenzuela and Arriagada, 2011).

Figure 1. Citizen Perception of the Political Position of *La Tercera*, 2010.



Source: National ICSO-UDP Survey 2010.

Note: People who reported not reading newspapers and the don't know/doesn't answer category were excluded.

News coverage in Chile has been studied from the standpoint of both its content (Porath and Mujica, 2011) and its influence on elections (Dussailant, 2005; Porath, 2009). Consumption of the media has also been shown to influence political perceptions (Bargsted, 2009; Arriagada et al., 2010; Valenzuela and Arriagada, 2011) and young people's willingness to turn out to vote (Arriagada and Schuster, 2008).

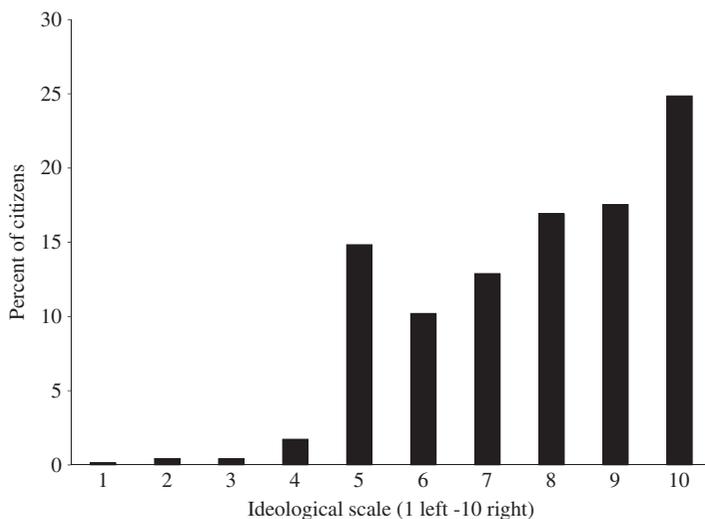
Chileans perceive *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* as promoting the ideas of the right. Figures 1 and 2 show their perception of the two newspapers' political positions as measured by the 2010 ICSO-UDP Survey. It asked people to position them on a left–right scale of 1–10 and found that a majority considered them both right-wing, but with *El Mercurio* receiving a score of 7.8, slightly to the right of *La Tercera* (6.6).

## Government of Eduardo Frei (1994–2000)

Eduardo Frei, the candidate of the governing Concertación coalition, won the 1993 presidential election with 58 percent of the vote. Figure 3 shows the accumulated bias in both newspapers during Frei's honeymoon period. Coverage by *El Mercurio* was positive, albeit becoming less so at the end of the first month. Despite some difficulties in the government's early weeks – particularly when Frei unsuccessfully requested the resignation of the chief of police, Rodolfo Stange, due to a pending case of human rights violations – *El Mercurio* maintained a positive bias, although this decreased through to mid-May, before again increasing.

*La Tercera* was particularly critical during Frei's honeymoon period, headlining with news related to the Stange conflict on eight of the ten days between 31 April and 10 May 1994. During the first month, its headlines showed a positive accumulated bias, but from the second month through to the end of his honeymoon period the accumulated bias was

Figure 2. Citizen Perception of the Political Position of *El Mercurio*, 2010.



Source: National ICSO-UDP Survey 2010.

Note: People who reported not reading newspapers and the don't know/doesn't answer category were excluded.

negative. As a result, although *El Mercurio* is associated with more right-wing positions, *La Tercera* was the more critical newspaper during Frei's honeymoon period.

### Government of Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006)

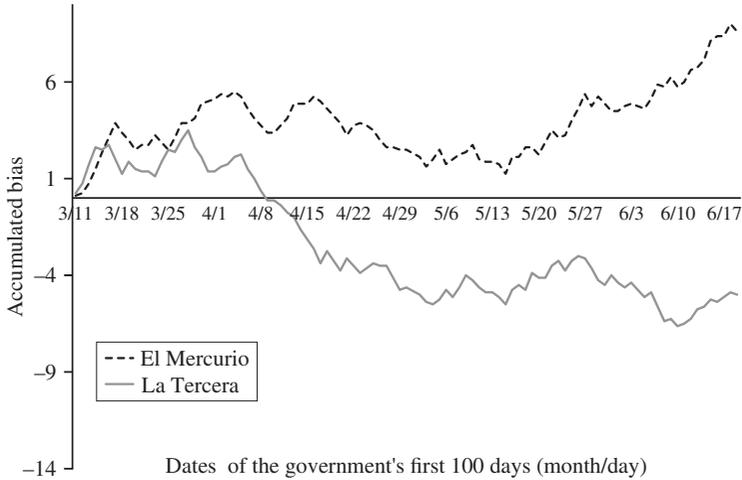
In the 1999 presidential election runoff, Concertación's Ricardo Lagos defeated the right's Joaquín Lavín. In his first year, unemployment was high, but his early economic policy decisions apparently assuaged fears triggered in conservative sectors by the election of the first left-wing president since the 1973 military coup.

Figure 4 shows that at the start of his honeymoon period there was a positive bias in *El Mercurio*'s coverage. Given its active opposition to the Allende government, a positive bias towards the liberal economic policies of Lagos is understandable. *La Tercera* gave more importance to political events and other domestic issues, with its emphasis on problems within the Concertación possibly explaining the negative accumulated bias of its coverage of Lagos.

Two weeks before Lagos took office, former dictator Augusto Pinochet was sent back to Chile on health-related humanitarian grounds after being arrested in London on charges of human rights violations. The outgoing government had taken steps to hasten his return and save Lagos from inheriting this problem, which took the country back to the polarisation of the dictatorship days. The negative bias in *La Tercera*'s coverage of Lagos may have been related to this polarisation but, given that this negative bias was not seen in *El Mercurio* – a newspaper that had been closer to the dictatorship – other factors must also have been involved.

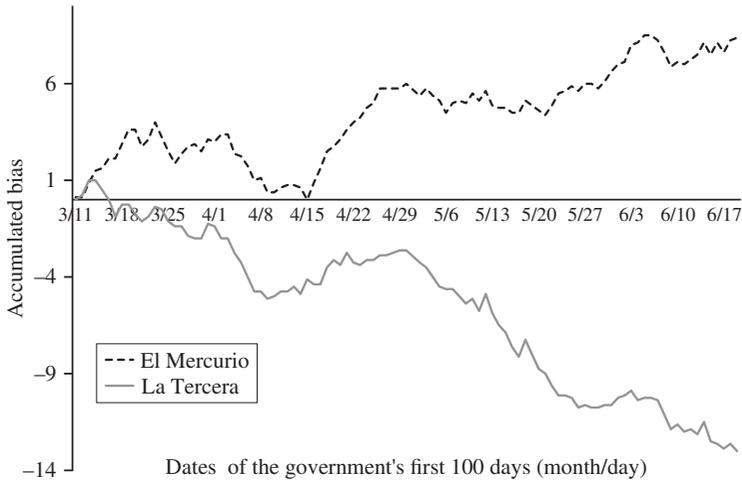
The contrast between *El Mercurio*'s positive coverage and *La Tercera*'s negative coverage was more marked for Lagos than for Frei. In both cases, *El Mercurio*'s positive

Figure 3. Accumulated Bias in the Headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* in the First 100 Days of Eduardo Frei.



Source: Authors' own data.

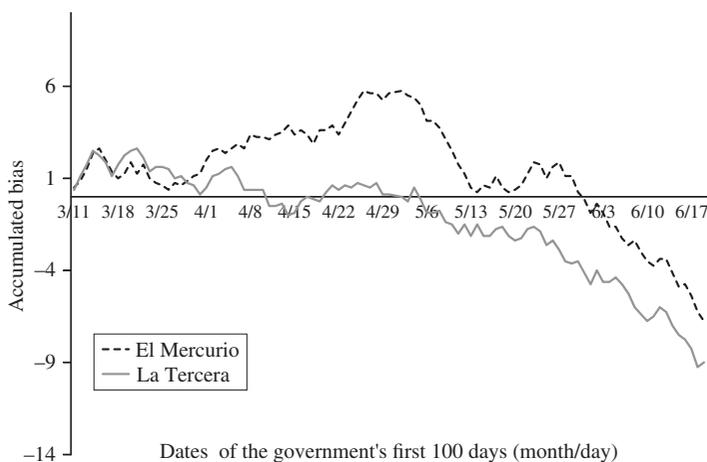
Figure 4. Accumulated Bias in the Headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* in the First 100 Days of Ricardo Lagos.



Source: Authors' own data.

accumulated bias was similar while *La Tercera*'s accumulated bias was more negative for Lagos than for Frei. Although both Frei and Lagos were from the Concertación, Lagos belonged to a more left-wing party than Frei, and this may have explained *La Tercera*'s more negative coverage.

Figure 5. Accumulated Bias in the Headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* in the First 100 Days of Michelle Bachelet.



Source: Authors' own data.

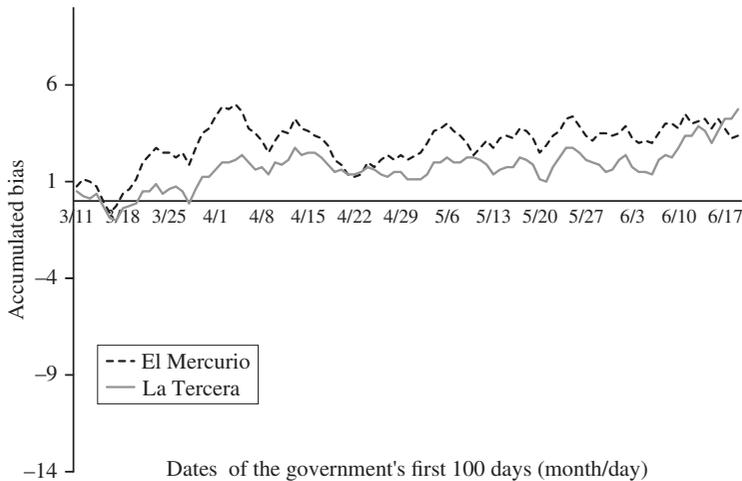
## Government of Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010)

A second round was also required in the 2005 presidential election which Michelle Bachelet, a socialist, won with 53.5 percent of the vote. During her first months in office, the economy grew strongly, driven by high prices for copper, the country's main export. In May 2006, however, student protests demanding better quality education caused a political crisis and triggered a cabinet reshuffle.

Coverage of Bachelet's first 100 days can be divided into two distinct periods. Initially, as shown in Figure 5, there was a positive bias. At the end of April, however, unfavourable headlines began to appear, related to the student movement – dubbed the *revolución pingüina* (penguin revolution) because of the colour of the uniform of the secondary school pupils – which forced Bachelet to make cabinet changes only three months after taking office. Despite the stable economy, the student conflict marked a negative trend in the bias of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*. As a result, accumulated bias in her first 100 days was more negative than in the same period for the other two Concertación presidents.

In contrast to its coverage of Frei and Lagos, *El Mercurio* ended the period with a negative bias against Bachelet. After its positive coverage during her first two months, its headlines became negative as the student movement gathered strength. *La Tercera's* headlines were also initially positive but, on 17 March, it published a negative headline about future increases in electricity prices. On 26 May, after a month of student protests, it published its first headline on this issue – 'Government gives in and starts talks with striking and sitting-in students' – and this was followed by numerous other negative headlines. However, even in the context of the student protests, coverage of Bachelet's honeymoon was less harsh than in the case of Lagos. The change in *El Mercurio* was more drastic and, towards the end of April 2006, its coverage became clearly negative. *La Tercera* was, by comparison, slightly more critical during the first half of her honeymoon, while toward the end of the period both newspapers became markedly critical.

**Figure 6.** Accumulated Bias in the Headlines of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* in the First 100 Days of Sebastián Piñera.



Source: Authors' own data.

## Government of Sebastián Piñera (2010–2014)

After twenty years of government by the Concertación, the right came to power in 2010 when the candidate of the Alianza coalition, Sebastián Piñera, obtained 51.6 percent in a second round vote. On 27 February, ten days before Piñera took office, the country was hit by a major earthquake, forcing the incoming government to redefine its priorities and implement a tax reform to finance reconstruction.

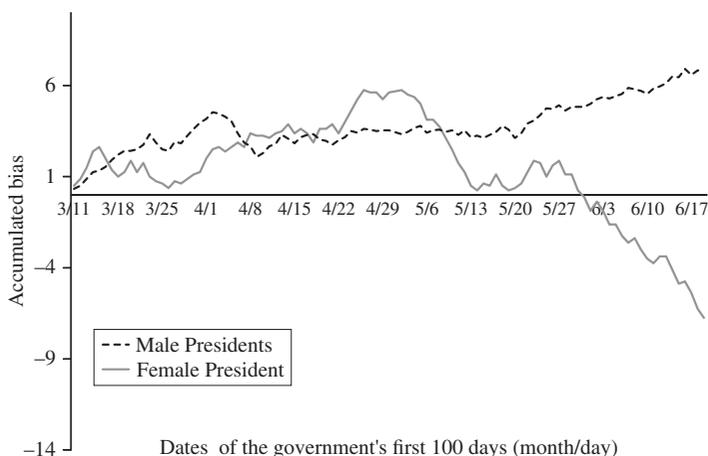
During its first month, Piñera's government was overshadowed by the president's conflicts of interest and those of some of his close collaborators. His impasses with the media and failure to comply with some campaign promises weakened his image.

During his honeymoon, newspaper headlines were more positive than for his predecessors. However, as shown in Figure 6, bias in *El Mercurio* fluctuated, with negative headlines about the government's installation process and the earthquake's consequences. In five of Piñera's first ten days, *El Mercurio* led with news about the earthquake. It also ran negative headlines about the announcement of government initiatives designed to capture the support of moderate voters and which could presumably have been unpopular with *El Mercurio*.

Unlike his predecessors, Piñera did not experience a negative bias in *La Tercera*'s coverage of his honeymoon. However, its accumulated bias was not markedly positive during his first two months. This was partly a result of the earthquake with which *La Tercera* led on seven of the first ten days of his government. As seen in Figure 6, this had a slight negative effect on coverage of Piñera. At the end of his honeymoon, however, he had a markedly positive accumulated bias, unlike the three Concertación presidents.

When we evaluate the average accumulated bias for all presidents in the two newspapers, we find that the variance was larger in *La Tercera* than in *El Mercurio*. While the latter's coverage tends to be more stable regardless of the president, *La Tercera*'s tends to vary more in both directions. Analysis of variance confirms that this difference

Figure 7. Accumulated Bias in *El Mercurio* Headlines in the First 100 Days of Chilean Presidents by President's Sex, 1994–2000.



Source: Authors' own data.

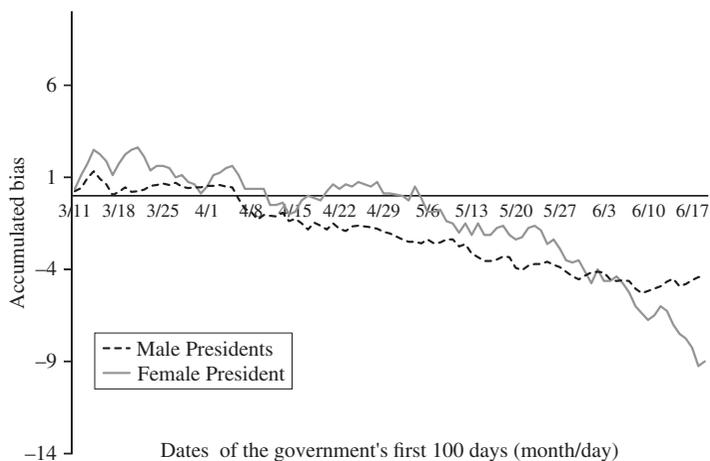
is statistically significant for all four presidents. While *El Mercurio*'s coverage tends to vary less between presidents, *La Tercera*'s varies more – whether towards a negative bias, as in the case of Frei, Lagos and Bachelet, or a positive bias, as in the case of Piñera.

## Gender Bias

We also evaluated the existence of gender bias in favour of or against the only woman to have served as president. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, *El Mercurio* had the more positive bias towards Bachelet at the start of her government. This, however, disappeared with the student movement and, although the economy was strong in 2006, *El Mercurio*'s coverage of Bachelet became ever less optimistic. The student conflict which began at the end of April could have marked the difference in the number of negative headlines she received. However, throughout a good part of May 2006, *El Mercurio* carried no openly negative headlines about the government's reaction to the student movement, and the negative trend of bias in its coverage of Bachelet in fact predated the student movement. Moreover, since Bachelet's honeymoon ended in the midst of the student crisis, we cannot reach any conclusion as to whether *El Mercurio*'s negative accumulated bias is a result of her sex or was caused by the student protests.

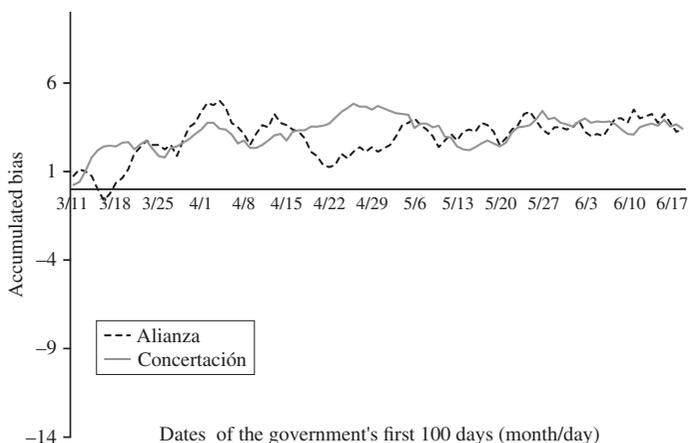
Figure 8 shows the bias in *La Tercera*'s coverage of the four presidential honeymoons by sex. In the first month, its bias is positive both for Bachelet and the other three presidents. In the second month, however, the accumulated bias is slightly more negative for the other three presidents than for Bachelet – a situation that changes in the third month, when it was more negative for Bachelet. The student protests may have contributed to the fact that Bachelet ended her honeymoon with an accumulated bias in *La Tercera* that was more negative than the average bias for the other three presidents.

**Figure 8.** Accumulated Bias in *La Tercera* Headlines in the First 100 Days of Chilean Presidents by President's Sex, 1994–2000.



Source: Authors' own data.

**Figure 9.** Accumulated Bias in *El Mercurio* Headlines in the First 100 Days of Chilean Presidents by Political Coalition, 1994–2000.

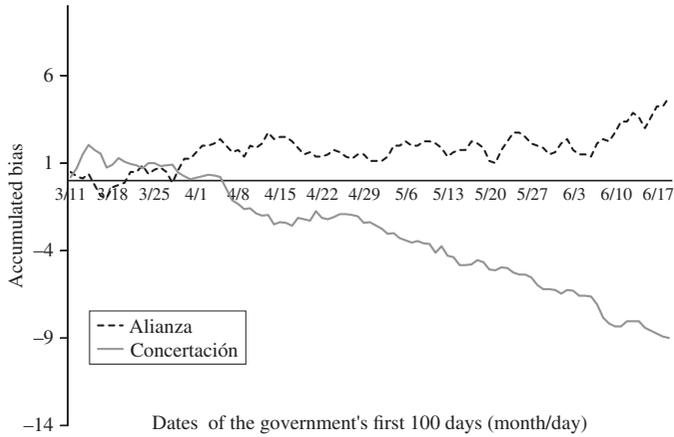


Source: Authors' own data.

In contrast to *El Mercurio*, whose headlines showed a positive accumulated bias for all four presidents, *La Tercera* showed a negative accumulated bias for all four but this was most negative in the case of Bachelet. In the first months of her government, the accumulated bias in *La Tercera* was less negative than the average accumulated bias for the other three presidents. At the beginning of June, however, Bachelet's accumulated bias in *La Tercera* fell below the average for the other three presidents, apparently reflecting the negative impact of the student movement on its coverage.

## Political Bias in Chilean newspaper headlines, 1994–2010

**Figure 10.** Accumulated Bias in *La Tercera* Headlines in the First 100 days of Chilean Presidents by Political Coalition, 1994–2000.



Source: Authors' own data.

Figures 7 and 8 show that *El Mercurio* had a greater negative bias towards Bachelet than towards the other presidents, while *La Tercera*'s coverage does not show a significant difference depending on the sex of the president. Analysis of variance confirms a statistically significant difference in the case of *El Mercurio* but not of *La Tercera* when coverage is compared according to the president's sex.

### Bias by President's Political Position

Figures 9 and 10 show the coverage of *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*, respectively, during the first 100 days of each government, taking the average bias for Concertación presidents and comparing it with the bias for Piñera. In *El Mercurio*, there is at first sight no obvious difference in the accumulated bias for Piñera as compared to the three Concertación presidents, in that, in both cases, there is more positive bias. However, in the case of the Concertación presidents, the behaviour of the accumulated bias is different to that for Piñera, with a better start and a peak at the end of the second month. Its coverage of Piñera, on the other hand, becomes more positive at the end of his first month. As from the third month, the bias in *El Mercurio* is similarly positive for the Concertación presidents and Piñera.

Figure 10 shows the bias in *La Tercera*'s coverage by coalition, with a marked difference between a negative bias in the case of the Concertación presidents and a positive bias for Piñera. Unlike *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera* shows favouritism towards the only president from the right and, towards the end of his first month in office, there was already a markedly positive accumulated bias towards Piñera. At the end of the honeymoon period, this positive bias is in contrast to the negative accumulated bias seen in the case of his three Concertación predecessors.

Although Piñera represented a more liberal right than would perhaps have been preferred by those who defended more conservative values, his election was considered a victory for all of the right. The ideological position of the owners of *El Mercurio* and *La*

**Table 1.** Issues Addressed in *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* Headlines during Presidential Honeymoon Periods, 1994–2010

	La Tercera #	La Tercera %	El Mercurio #	El Mercurio %
Domestic politics	173	43.3	193	48.3
Domestic news	105	26.2	87	21.7
Economy	49	12.2	52	13.0
International news	38	9.5	65	16.2
Other	35	8.8	3	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' own data.

*Tercera* is similar and *El Mercurio* did not show a significant ideological bias in favour of Piñera. In other words, the strikingly favourable bias in *La Tercera* in favour of Piñera cannot be attributed only to ideological affinity.

Figures 9 and 10 show that there is no difference between *El Mercurio*'s coverage of the Concertación presidents and Piñera, while in *La Tercera* there is a bias in favour of Piñera. Analysis of variance confirms this perception. *La Tercera*'s coverage shows statistically significant differences depending on the political coalition to which the president belongs; this is not the case for *El Mercurio*.

## Bias by News Issue

As the issues with which the two newspapers opt to lead are different, the emphasis they give to different issues may have a bearing on bias. Since *El Mercurio* carries more headlines about international politics, the differences in bias between the two newspapers could be partly determined by international tensions. Similarly, because *La Tercera* carries more sports-related headlines (classified in 'others'), the direction of its bias could also reflect sports results.

Table 1 shows the frequency with which different issues appear in the two newspapers' headlines. In both, almost half of all headlines refer to domestic politics. This is followed in second place by domestic news and in third place the economy, with similar percentages in both papers. The principal difference lies in the weight they give to international news, which accounts for almost twice as many headlines in *El Mercurio* as in *La Tercera*, and to other news (entertainment and sports). While *La Tercera* leads with news of this type on almost one in ten days, *El Mercurio* does so only on 1 in 100 days. As we coded only the principal headline, it could be that secondary headlines cover similar issues or that the news that goes under the main headline in one newspaper appears only in secondary places in the other.

In order to measure the combined effect on bias of the news issue selected for headlines, the coalition and the president's sex, we carried out two multiple linear regressions (OLS), one for each newspaper. The dependent variable is the average bias, which can range from -1 to 1, while as independent variables we created six dichotomous variables. The coalition takes a value of 1 or 0 when the president is from the Alianza or Concertación, respectively, while the president's sex takes a value of 1 for a man and 0 for a woman. In addition, we created a dichotomous variable for each news issue

*Political Bias in Chilean newspaper headlines, 1994–2010*

**Table 2.** Linear Regression of Bias in Headlines of *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio*, 1994–2010

	La Tercera	El Mercurio
Coalition of president: Alianza	0.154*** (0.05)	0.026 (0.05)
Sex of president: Male	-0.019 (0.05)	0.152*** (0.05)
<b>Issue of lead news item</b>		
Domestic politics	-0.380*** (0.07)	0.610*** (0.24)
Economy	-0.304*** (0.09)	0.498* (0.24)
International news	-0.310*** (0.09)	0.481* (0.25)
Domestic news	-0.538*** (0.08)	0.206 (0.25)
Constant	0.292*** (0.08)	-0.568*** (0.25)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.13	0.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.13
N	400	400

Note: Standard error in parentheses. \*p < 0.1; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01.

Source: Authors.

(domestic politics, economy, international news and domestic news). The results are set out in Table 2.

In line with our previous results, these results indicate that bias in *La Tercera* tends to be more positive when the president is from the Alianza. In *El Mercurio* there is also a positive bias towards Piñera, but this is not statistically significant. *El Mercurio* is more favourably inclined towards the male presidents. *La Tercera's* headlines were also more unfavourable towards Bachelet than the other presidents, but the coefficient is not statistically significant. The different signs of the coefficients for gender bias for *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* may reflect that, in its choice of headlines, *El Mercurio* was more critical towards Bachelet either because she is a woman or because it was more critical of the government that was in power when the penguin revolution broke out. However, the fact that coverage of Bachelet was initially positive and became markedly more negative with the start of the student protests renders us unable to tell if this negative coverage was associated with the penguin revolution or with her sex.

When *La Tercera's* headlines refer to domestic politics, the economy or international or domestic news, this tends to have a negative impact on the headline's bias. The coefficients indicate that the negative impact on the average bias of its headlines is greater in the case of domestic non-political news. When *El Mercurio* leads with domestic politics, the economy or international news, this tends to have a positive effect on the average bias.

Table 2 also shows that *La Tercera* carries headlines that are more critical than those of *El Mercurio*. Across all the issues with which it led, *La Tercera* showed a negative – and statistically significant – bias while, in *El Mercurio*, there was always a positive bias (that was also statistically significant for all issues except domestic news). Table 2 shows that, even when controlling for this, *La Tercera's* headlines had a greater

positive bias towards Piñera as compared to the honeymoon periods of the Concertación presidents. *El Mercurio* showed a greater positive bias during the governments of the male presidents as compared to that of Bachelet. In general, *La Tercera* appears more favourable towards Piñera while *El Mercurio* appears less favourable towards Bachelet than the other three presidents.

## Conclusion

Given that the owners of *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* have been actively associated with the right's positions, using their media to promote their political and economic views, we empirically test for the existence of bias in their coverage of presidents to whom they are ideologically opposite and with whom they share political views. In addition, since opinion surveys show that Chileans perceive both newspapers as favouring the right – and *El Mercurio* as being more to the right than *La Tercera* – we seek to verify objectively the accuracy of this perception.

We find that both Chilean newspapers do, in fact, give favourable coverage to the government of Piñera, the only right-wing president to govern between 1994 and 2010. Using data from the first 100 days of the governments of Presidents Frei, Lagos, Bachelet and Piñera, we show that *El Mercurio's* coverage is favourable to all four presidents, while *La Tercera* is favourable towards Piñera but critical of the three Concertación presidents. When comparing the two newspapers' coverage by the sex of the president, we do not find evidence of gender bias. Although the accumulated bias in coverage of Bachelet's honeymoon was negative, this appears to be explained by the student movement, which had a marked effect on the government's performance as from May 2006. Prior to the student protests, coverage of Bachelet was slightly more negative in *La Tercera* than in *El Mercurio*. When the issue addressed in headlines is taken into account, controlling for differences in the issues covered by each newspaper, we find that *La Tercera* was more favourable to Piñera than the other three presidents, while *El Mercurio* was less favourable to Bachelet.

Media coverage of governments is not confined to the issues that are the subject of their headlines. In addition, the emphases of *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* differ, and this affects bias. In general, during the period analysed, *La Tercera* had a more negative bias than *El Mercurio*, regardless of the president's ideology or sex. However, the evidence presented suggests that the widespread public belief that Chilean newspapers are right-wing is a simplification. We find, in fact, that *El Mercurio* shows a rather positive bias in its coverage of all four presidents. *La Tercera*, on the other hand, carried headlines that were more favourable during the government of Piñera than those of his predecessors. Even when controlling for the issues addressed in the two newspapers' headlines, there is a positive bias towards his honeymoon period in *La Tercera*.

The ideological leanings of the controllers of Chilean newspapers do not suffice to explain bias in their headlines. Both newspapers are right-wing, but *La Tercera* was more critical of Concertación governments than *El Mercurio*. In the 1960s, *El Mercurio's* coverage in favour of right-wing positions led student leaders to the denunciation that '*El Mercurio* lies'. Today, the evidence of the right-wing bias in the two newspapers' headlines would lead those same critics who associated defence of right-wing positions with lying to say that, if *El Mercurio* lies, *La Tercera* lies more.

## Acknowledgements

This paper was partially funded by Chile's Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico (FONDECYT #1140072) and the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (CONICYT/FONDAP #15130009). A descriptive analysis of the same dataset was published in Navia et al. (2013). We thank R. Bradley for translating the article into English.

## References

- Alemán, E. and Navia, P. (2009) 'Institutions and the Legislative Success of "Strong" Presidents: An Analysis of Government Bills in Chile'. *Journal of Legislative Studies* 15(4): 401–419.
- Arriagada, A., Navia, P. and Schuster, M. (2010) '¿Consumo luego pienso, o pienso y luego consumo?: Consumo de medios, predisposición política, percepción económica y aprobación presidencial en Chile'. *Revista de Ciencia Política* 30(3): 669–695.
- Arriagada, A. and Schuster, M. (2008) 'Consumo de medios y participación ciudadana de los jóvenes Chilenos'. *Cuadernos de Información* 22: 34–41.
- Asociación Chilena de Agencias de Publicidad (ACHAP) (2013) *Índice de circulación y lectoría en Chile. Primer semestre*. Asociación Chilena de Agencias de Publicidad: Santiago.
- Bargsted, M. (2009) 'La formación de la opinión pública: el rol de la información y las disposiciones políticas de los chilenos' in R. Cordero (ed.) *La sociedad de la opinión. Reflexiones sobre encuestas y cambio político en democracia*. Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales: Santiago, 159–196.
- Baron, D. P. (2006) 'Persistent Media Bias'. *Journal of Public Economics* 90(1): 1–36.
- Barrett, A. W. and Barrington, L. W. (2005) 'Bias in Newspaper Photograph Selection'. *Political Research Quarterly* 58(4): 609–618.
- Bartels, L. (1993) 'Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure'. *American Political Science Review* 87(2): 267–285.
- Bresnahan, R. (2003) 'The Media and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile: Democratic Promise Unfulfilled'. *Latin American Perspectives* 30(6): 39–68.
- Brown, K. A. and Gitlin, T. (2011) 'Partisans, Watchdog, and Entertainers' in R. Y. Shapiro and L. R. Jacobs (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*. Oxford University Press: New York, 74–88.
- Chong, D. and Druckman, J. N. (2011) 'Public Elite Interactions' in R. Y. Shapiro and L. R. Jacobs (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*. Oxford University Press: New York, 170–188.
- Correa Sutil, S. (2005) *Con las riendas del poder. La derecha Chilena en el siglo XX*. Editorial Sudamericana: Santiago.
- Couso, J. (2011) *El mercado como obstáculo a la libertad de expresión: la concentración de la prensa escrita en Chile en la era democrática*. Plataforma Democrática Working Paper no 2.
- Dermota, K. (2002) *Chile Inédito. El periodismo bajo democracia*. Ediciones B: Santiago.
- Druckman, J. (2005) 'Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters'. *Political Communication* 22: 463–481.
- Druckman, J. and Parkin, M. (2005) 'The Impact of Media Bias: How Editorial Slant Affects Voters'. *Journal of Politics* 67(4): 1030–1049.
- Dussaillant, P. (2005) *Medios y elecciones. La elección presidencial de 1999*. Centro de Estudios Bicentenario: Santiago.
- Entman, R. M. (2007) 'Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power'. *Journal of Communication* 57(1): 163–173.
- Fazio, H. (1997) *Mapa actual de la extrema riqueza en Chile*. LOM-ARCIS: Santiago.

- Gans, J. and Leigh, A. (2012) 'How Partisan is the Press? Multiple Measures of Media Slant'. *Economic Record* 88(280): 127–147.
- Geer, J. and Kahn, K. F. (1993) 'Grabbing Attention: An Experimental Investigation of Headlines During Campaigns'. *Political Communication* 10(2): 175–191.
- González, M. (2000) *La conjura (los mil un días del golpe)*. Ediciones B: Santiago.
- Graber, D. (2001) *Mass Media and American Politics*. CQ Press: Washington.
- Graber, D. (2003) 'The Media and Democracy: Beyond Myths and Stereotypes'. *Annual Review of Political Science* 6(1): 139–160.
- Groseclose, T. and Milyo, J. (2005) 'A Measure of Media Bias'. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120(4): 1191–1237.
- Herrero, V. (2014) *Agustín Edwards Eastman. Una biografía desclasificada del dueño de El Mercurio*. Debate: Santiago.
- Hughes, W. J. (1995) 'The "Not-So-Genial" Conspiracy: The New York Times and Six Presidential "Honeymoons": 1953–1993'. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72(4): 841–850.
- Jacobs, L. R. and Shapiro, R. Y. (1994) 'Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The Use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign'. *American Political Science Review* 88(3): 527–540.
- Jacobs, L. R. and Shapiro, R. Y. (2011) 'Informational Interdependence' in L. R. Jacobs and R. Y. Shapiro (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*. Oxford University Press: New York, 3–21.
- Jones, A. S. (2009) *Losing the News: The Future of the News that Feeds Democracy*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Jordan, D. L. (1993) 'Newspaper Effects on Policy Preferences'. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57(2): 191–204.
- Kahn, K. F. (1994) 'The Distorted Mirror: Press Coverage of Women Candidates for Statewide Office'. *Journal of Politics* 56(1): 154–173.
- Kahn, K. F. and Fridkin, K. (1996) *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Kahn, K. F. and Goldenberg, E. N. (1991) 'Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in US Senate Campaign Coverage'. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55(2): 180–199.
- Kahn, K. F. and Kenney, P. J. (2002) 'The Slant of the News: How Editorial Endorsements Influence Campaign Coverage and Citizens' Views of Candidates'. *American Political Science Review* 96(2): 381–394.
- Lagos, C. (ed.) (2009) *El diario de Agustín*. LOM: Santiago.
- Lundman, R. (2003) 'The Newsworthiness and Selection Bias in News About Murder: Comparative and Relative Effects of Novelty and Race and Gender Typifications on Newspaper Coverage of Homicide'. *Sociological Forum* 18(3): 357–386.
- Marín, C. and Cordero, R. (2009) 'Medios masivos, opinión pública y transformaciones de la democracia' in R. Cordero (ed.) *La sociedad de la opinión. Reflexiones sobre encuestas y cambio político en democracia*. Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales: Santiago, 251–279.
- Mayol, A. (2012) *No al lucro. De la crisis del modelo a la nueva era política*. Debate: Santiago.
- McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. (1972) 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media'. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(2): 176–187.
- Miller, G. (2001) 'Newspaper Coverage and Gender'. *Women and Politics* 22(3): 83–100.
- Mönckeberg, M. O. (2009) *Los magnates de la prensa. Concentración de los medios de comunicación en Chile*. Debate: Santiago.
- Moulián, T. (1997) *El Chile Actual. Anatomía de un mito*. LOM-Arcis: Santiago.
- Navia, P., Osorio, R. and Valenzuela, F. (2013) 'Sesgo político en las lunas de miel presidenciales: El Mercurio y La Tercera, 1994–2010' in A. Arriagada and P. Navia (eds.)

*Political Bias in Chilean newspaper headlines, 1994–2010*

- Intermedios. Medios de comunicación y democracia en Chile.* Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales: Santiago, 35–57.
- Page, B. I. (1996) *Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy.* University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Porath, W. (2009) 'Los temas de la discusión pública en las elecciones presidenciales Chileñas 2005: relaciones entre las agendas de los medios y las agendas mediatizadas de los candidatos y del gobierno'. *América Latina Hoy* 46: 41–73.
- Porath, W. and Mujica, C. (2011) 'Las noticias extranjeras en la televisión pública y privada de Chile comparada con la de catorce países'. *Comunicación y Sociedad: Revista de la Facultad de Comunicación* 24(2): 333–370.
- Portales, F. (2000) *Chile. Una democracia tutelada.* Sudamericana: Santiago.
- Roessler, P. (1999) 'The Individual Agenda-Designing Process How Interpersonal Communication, Egocentric Networks, and Mass Media Shape the Perception of Political Issues by Individuals'. *Communication Research* 26(6): 666–700.
- Roessler, P. (2008) 'Agenda-Setting, Framing and Priming' in W. Donsbach and M. W. Traugott (eds.) *The Sage Handbook on Public Opinion Research.* Sage: London, 205–217.
- Salazar, G. (2010) *Conversaciones con Carlos Altamirano. Memorias Críticas.* Debate: Santiago.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999) 'Framing as a Theory of Media Effects'. *Journal of Communication* 49(1): 103–122.
- Scheufele, D. A. and Tewksbury, D. (2007) 'Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models'. *Journal of Communication* 57(1): 9–20.
- Soto, Á. (2003) *El Mercurio y la difusión del pensamiento político neoliberal, 1955–1970.* Centro de Estudios Bicentenario: Santiago.
- Sunkel, G. (1985) *Razón y pasión en la prensa popular. un estudio sobre la cultura popular, cultura de masas y cultura política.* ILET: Santiago.
- Sunkel, G. and Geoffroy, E. (2001) *Concentración económica de los medios de comunicación.* LOM: Santiago.
- Tironi, E. and Sunkel, G. (1993) 'Modernización de las comunicaciones y democratización de la política'. *Estudios Públicos* 52: 215–246.
- Tironi, E. and Sunkel, O. (2000) 'The Modernization of Communications: The Media in the Transition to Democracy in Chile' in R. Gunther and M. Mughan (eds.) *Democracy and the Media.* Cambridge University Press: New York, 165–194.
- Valenzuela, S. and Arriagada, A. (2011) 'Politics without Citizens? Public Opinion, Television News, the President, and Real-World Factors in Chile, 2000–2005'. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16(3): 357–381.
- Valenzuela, S. and Correa, T. (2009) 'Press Coverage and Public Opinion on Women Candidates'. *International Communication Gazette* 71(3): 203–223.
- Weatherly, J. T., Petros Christopherson, K. and Haugen, E. (2007) 'Perceptions of Political Bias in the Headlines of Two Major News Organizations'. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 12(2): 91–104.
- Weaver, D. H., Graber, D., McCombs, M. and Eyal, C. H. (1981) *Media Agenda Setting in a Presidential Election: Issues, Images and Interest.* Greenwood: Westport.
- Zaller, J. (1992) *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion.* Cambridge University Press: New York.