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**Government Control of and Influence on the Press in Latin America:  
The Case of Argentina During the Presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2014)**

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**Abstract**

*Latin American governments restrict the media for political, historical, and cultural reasons. As these governments trend toward socialism, their influence on media increases. This paper examines methods of media control and investigates whether the increased control leads to bias and inaccuracy of information, both of which jeopardize the functioning of a democratic political system. Four newspapers in Argentina were used as a case study; articles from 2004 to 2013 were evaluated for bias and accuracy. The expected outcome was that newspapers sympathetic toward her administration would become more favorably biased toward her while critical newspapers would become more unfavorably biased. In both cases, the accuracy of reported inflation rates would decrease. The results, however, show three newspapers became more neutral, increasingly printing articles that were not government related or that omitted references to the president. The analysis of the accuracy of the inflation rate was inconclusive due to data limitations.*

Manipulation of the media by Latin American governments is perceived to be increasing in recent years (NGO, 2011). According to the North American Congress on Latin America, governments limit the freedom of the press to promote national security, to help regulate the economy and to prevent monopolies (Hall, 2012). However, according to Freedom House, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization that advocates for democracy, governments also limit media to curtail criticism against the government, political freedom, and human rights (Karlekar, 2012). The prevalence of censorship has varied with the types of government systems. As Latin America shifted from military regimes to democratic leadership in the 1990s, the freedom of the press increased under neoliberal, laissez-faire policies (Karlekar, 2012). However, since around the turn of the 21st century, the freedom of the press has decreased as Latin American governments lean toward socialism. Voters elected leaders such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1999 and Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2006 because they wanted more equality and justice for the poorer working class (Larraburre, 2013).

An increasing level of censorship is worrisome because government power and policies can virtually achieve prior restraint, defined as the restriction of the publication of information before it is published. Such

censorship, when not used solely for issues of national security, is in violation of the American Convention on Human Rights (Berfley, 2010), as freedom of speech is essentially freedom from prior restraint. Restricted freedom of speech can suggest more bias and less public access to truthful information (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2014). “According to a standard principle in free speech law, the remedy for falsehoods is more speech, not enforced silence” (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2013, n.p.). Attempts to restrict the media can result in more bias and a polarization effect. The authors go on to note, “But empirical research demonstrates that corrections of falsehoods can backfire by increasing people’s commitment to their inaccurate beliefs, and that presentation of balanced information can promote polarization, thus increasing pre-existing social divisions” (n.p.). So the more biased the media outlets become, the higher their potential to lead the public astray. Contrary to what one might think, the media outlets with opposing perspectives do not necessarily balance each other out and cause people to consider information from both sides and, as a result, ‘meet in the middle’. Instead, they often reinforce the bias of their audience and lead them away from a more truthful, neutral perspective (Best, 2010).

Thus, restrictions on the media can have serious consequences. In addition to hindering the flow of accurate information from the media to the public, government restrictions can also impede the accurate flow of information from the government to the media. A government that controls what the media do and do not print affects government accountability. The media—most notably, the print media—are the “Fourth Estate” of government; in other words, they act as a watchdog that monitors the three branches of government (Sehgal, 2007). Newspapers and journals provide necessary checks and balances in a government. If the government prevents news outlets from publishing information that puts the government in a negative light, the government hinders public access to truthful information. For example, if media outlets fail to contradict false information the government conveys about economic performance, then the public is misled. An informed public is essential to the well functioning of a democracy. “We can only participate effectively in our democracy if we have the information we need to make informed choices that affect us” (Hartigan, 2009, n.p.). So, because news media must serve as a watchdog, it is imperative that they not be controlled or influenced by the government.

Governments everywhere exert influence over the media, to some degree; however, the governments of Latin America—especially the South American countries of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina—have begun influencing the media in recent years to a degree that is catching the public’s eye. Through explicit and implicit controls, Latin American governments are limiting the media’s watchdog function. Explicitly, officials have passed laws that place limits on the media. Implicitly, the governments provide funding or invest in government promotions (and therefore, revenue) in companies that present them favorably (Karlekar, 2012). Although most countries in Latin America have right-to-information laws (Mendel, 2009), only Costa Rica, Belize, and Uruguay have “free” media, ranging from 1.0 and 2.5 on a seven-point scale determined by a *Freedom in the World* survey (Karlekar, 2012). Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela, and Cuba have “not free” media, falling on the high end of the scale between 5.5 and 7.0 (Karlekar, 2012). The rest of the countries, which constitute the majority, are deemed “partly free” by Freedom House, meaning that they fall between 3.0 and 5.0 on the scale.

Argentina provides a good case study for this paper since it falls in the middle between the “free” and “not free” ends of the spectrum, making it a representative Latin American country (Karlekar, 2012). Media organizations within Argentina and around the world, however, have strongly criticized the growing measures of control under President Fernández de Kirchner. For example, the *Global Journalist*, a converged newsroom that covers global news and the challenges to a free press, noted that Argentina fell seven places from 2012 to 2013 in the press freedom rankings by Reporters Without Border (Siegelbaum, 2012). Thus, it seems Argentina might be swinging back toward an authoritarian policy of controlling the press. This is supported by the complaints of members of the opposition in Argentina, who have warned for nearly a decade that the government is headed toward authoritarianism (O’Grady, 2010).

The goal of this study is to evaluate where the media of Argentina fall on the continuum of censorship and to explore whether they are shifting toward being less free of government influence. I went to Argentina in the spring of 2013 (by the U.S. calendar) to attend school and to conduct fieldwork for this study. I solidified my topic and methodology based on my experiences living in Argentina. Based on preliminary discussions with Argentine citizens and a review of four of the top newspapers in Argentina, it was suggested that Fernández de Kirchner was manipulating the media in various ways. As a result, I decided to examine the ways in which her government was perhaps controlling the media, and to investigate the gravity of her influence on the media in terms of what they report. If journalists were being repressed to the point that Argentines were not able to stay adequately informed, then it was important that international organizations address the situation. In addition, because Argentina was a representative country, the results may be reflective of a trend for the whole region, intensifying the importance of the results.

In the following sections of this paper, I investigate the possible ways in which the Argentine president may be controlling the media. I analyze changes in four newspapers during the timespan of Fernández de Kirchner’s presidency to demonstrate the possible effect of the presidency on media content bias and accuracy. I determine whether the increasing number of measures intended to influence the media have caused newspapers to become more biased and

polarized and, consequently, whether the information the papers report has become increasingly inaccurate under the presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Argentina's history provides the context for understanding the relationship between the government and media. Argentina has a history of polarizing, charismatic leaders (Disney & Williams, 2014), the most notable being the charismatic socialist couple, the Perones. Juan Domingo Perón, who was elected in 1946, argued for the rights of laborers and unions and served as president for 10 years. While his isolationist and spending policies led to sky-high inflation rates, the Argentina people loved and idealized him. His wife, Eva, was said to have co-governed the country with him during the first six years of his presidency (Duarte de Perón, 2013). Juan Domingo Perón was overthrown as president by a military coup d'état in 1955, but he returned to serve a year as president in 1973. During this year, right-wing and left-wing Peronists, or supporters of Perón's policy and ideals, split and politics became more polarized.

President Néstor Kirchner, a leftist who served from 2003 until 2007, was charismatic, as was his wife who served after him, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner; many consider them to be contemporary "Peronists." Although "Kirchnerism" is considered to be center-left in terms of political perspectives, the same growing polarization seemed to occur as it did with Perón. For example, Argentines on the streets of Buenos Aires with whom I spoke say they either love or hate Cristina Fernández de Kirchner; very few provided a neutral or balanced opinion.

These extreme perspectives may be, in part, the result of a series of a series of tumultuous political events that caused Argentines to place their faith not in the banks or the institution of government but in their current leader. The 20<sup>th</sup> century held at least a dozen coups or planned coups. A military dictatorship, the right-wing *junta*, held power from 1976 through 1983, and more than 30,000 people "disappeared" (General, 2013). The *desaparecidos* (or disappeared ones) consisted of oppositionists, unionists, intellectuals, professors, students, and journalists who were arrested, tortured, or secretly murdered. Their families never got to bury a body, and bringing justice for their deaths remains a popular political topic.

Economic and corruption problems mounted until Argentina transitioned back to democratic elections in 1983. In 2001, the economy suffered a *corralito*, a

run of private sector deposits, as a result of detrimental lending policies, which led to a scarring economic and social crisis in 2002 that remains on the minds of many Argentines today. The government froze bank accounts and forced Argentines to convert any U.S. dollars in their account to pesos, which had lost more than 75% of their value (Kurtz-Phelan, 2002). Income inequality and poverty increased, and those who had had little before were left with nothing afterward (Molina & Ageitos, 2008). The country's Gross Domestic Product plummeted, as did employment and wages (Beccaria, Esquivel, & Maurizio, 2005). In addition, the World Bank reported that the risk of maternal death peaked in 2001, surpassing a risk of 1 in 600 (World Bank, 2014); Argentines also complained of human rights violations (Kurtz-Phelan, 2002). Throughout the course of a year, Buenos Aires lost its status as the most expensive city in Latin America and instead became the cheapest city (Anonymous, 2003). The financial crisis shook the faith of the Argentine people irreparably (Kurtz-Phelan, 2002) and harmed the media as well. For instance, ever since the ensuing recession, it is suggested that Argentine media have been more vulnerable to government pressures and corruption ("Argentina: Crisis," 2003). As a result, the freedom of the press in Argentina has reportedly decreased.

The coups, the junta, the "musical chairs game" of leaders, and the *corralito* have all contributed to Argentines' trust in the long-term economic structure, the banks and the governmental hierarchy to deteriorate. Citizens of Latin American countries, in general, tend to align their country's identity with who is leading, which gives the leader more power (Disney & Williams, 2014). Accordingly, Argentines tend to personify the government and hold the president accountable for many government-related issues. As a result, the Argentine presidents appear committed to presenting a more favorable image of themselves to the public and to curbing the media's criticism of the government.

During Néstor Kirchner's term as president (2003-2007), he constructed a new political philosophy known as Kirchnerism. As a candidate, he was mostly unknown by voters; however for those who did know him, he was considered to be Peronist, an identification that triggered familiarity and nostalgia (Montero & Vincent, 2013). Kirchner gained popularity among the citizenry as the "people's man" and "has endeared himself to his countrymen by talking tough to the International Monetary Fund" (Langman, 2004, p. 1).

For most of his presidency, the government and Argentina's largest media conglomerate, Grupo Clarín, had a good relationship. However, Néstor Kirchner's wife, Christina Fernández de Kirchner, did not enjoy a positive relationship with Grupo Clarín. For example, in 2007, *Clarín* reported that a businessman flew in from Venezuela with \$800,000 in cash, "prompting allegations that the money was meant as a secret contribution for Mrs. Kirchner's presidential campaign" (Romero, 2012, para. 12). As a result of this story, whether true or not, Néstor Kirchner's relationship with the media began to sour. Despite this tension, Néstor Kirchner successfully paved the way for his wife's candidacy after his term ended in 2007; he died three years later in 2010.

President Fernández de Kirchner began her term as president in 2007 and adopted her husband's established Kirchnerist policies. Despite previous concerns, she was the overwhelming favorite for reelection in 2011 (Moffett, 2007), winning 23 of Argentina's 24 provinces as well as 51.4% of the popular vote—a feat Calvo and Murillo (2012) attributed to "the ideological appeal and remarkable durability of the Peronist brand in the country's political system" (p. 1). However, in 2014 the polls indicate that she is strongly disliked by many Argentines. According to Management & Fit, an Argentine polling consultancy referenced in *Reuters*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, Fernández de Kirchner's national approval rating has fallen to 25% as of April 2014 (Bronstein, 2014).

Part of this disapproval is based in Fernández de Kirchner's economic policy. For example, the President is known for nationalizing Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), a formerly private oil company (Schmall, 2012). This initiative brought much international criticism because, as an editorialist for *The Washington Times* put it, "Nationalization will not change the hard math: YPF cannot continue to sell below cost forever, nor can the Argentine government afford to fund the difference" (Ghei, 2012, para. 5). Not all applications of Fernández de Kirchner's economic policy brought criticism, however. The president also nationalized the broadcast of soccer games on TV—a move that even most of her opponents supported because soccer is such a universal passion in Argentina (Forero, 2009).

Media in Argentina are typically divided by their political bias (e.g. conservative versus liberal);

today many can be classified as either pro-Kirchner or anti-Kirchner. Major media outlets that favor the Kirchners are *Tiempo Argentino*, news organization *Telam*, TV Channel 7, and *Radio Nacional* (Argentina: Press, 2007) while media organizations that oppose and criticize Fernández de Kirchner's presidency include media conglomerates Grupo Clarín and *La Nación* (Argentina politics, 2010). The latter two have published information that challenges the validity of the information released by the government, and have consequently been attacked and accused of lying by the government ("Argentina politics," 2010).

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on four newspapers, each headquartered in Buenos Aires. The first newspaper, *Clarín*, was founded in 1945 by Grupo Clarín, the largest media conglomerate in Argentina and the "country's most important media group, both in economic and political terms" (Platt, 2007, p. 16). An international watchdog association produced at the Missouri School of Journalism reported, "[Grupo] Clarín controls 60% of the cable market and 25% of the Internet market; it has ownership of 10 radio stations, six newspapers, a news agency and Argentina's second most popular TV channel" (Peltier, 2013, para. 6). Grupo Clarín therefore represents a large portion of the media available to Argentines.

However, according to Peltier (2013), Grupo Clarín is also "considered one of the biggest critics of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's government" (para. 6). Grupo Clarín has been the focus of most of Kirchner's alleged censorship, and its clash with the government began around the same time that Fernández de Kirchner assumed presidency. An incident that spawned criticism from *Clarín* occurred March 11, 2008, when Fernández de Kirchner raised farming export taxes (Sreeharsha & Barrionuevo, 2008). Grupo Clarín is also a principal organizer of *Expoagro*, the country's largest annual agricultural fair, and it sided with the farmers on strike (Sreeharsha & Barrionuevo, 2008). As a result, relations between Grupo Clarín and the government weakened, and some claim that the government has actively harmed the company. Indeed, Grupo Clarín is in the process of breaking into six licensed groups of media outlets to be divided amongst shareholders or sold as a result of a law passed in 2009 restricting the concentration of media ownership, an event on which I elaborate later ("Argentina News," 2014).

*La Nación*, founded in 1870, is the second

newspaper in this study, and it is also perceived as critical of the government. The government has accused owners of *Clarín* and its rival paper, *La Nación*, of working with the dictatorship to obtain Papel Prensa, the only newsprint manufacturer in Argentina (Rafsky, 2012b). *Clarín* and *La Nación* are both traditionally anti-Kirchner and have a similar audience. Editors from both papers have reported that they believe they are under attack by the Argentina government (Turner, 2013). The last two newspapers in this study, *La Prensa* and *Página/12*, tend to report the government in a more favorable light. It is important to note that the latter newspaper was criticized in 2004 by one of its writers for withholding the publication of articles about the impeachment of Néstor Kirchner's chief of staff for corruption (Nudler, 2004).

Although President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is not accused of exercising blatant censorship of the media like the military junta did, she is accused of controlling the media both explicitly and implicitly, beyond issues of national security. It is reported that topics of government corruption and conflicts of interest among journalists and government officials have led to the majority of the press censorship, although violence may also play a role in media censorship (Karlekar, 2012). For example, supporters of Néstor Kirchner were accused of threatening and beating a journalist who wrote critically of a Santa Cruz taxation policy at the time when incoming President Néstor Kirchner was governor of Santa Cruz ("Argentina: Crisis," 2003).

It follows that high levels of government corruption in Argentina would increase the government's interest in manipulating the media. According to a 2013 study by nonprofit organization Transparency International, 72% of the 1,001 Argentines who were polled nationally via telephone said their government's corruption had increased in the past year, making Argentina the Latin American nation with the fastest rise in corruption. It is suggested that corruption in Argentina worsened after 2002, when the Argentine Congress' control increased to combat the economic crisis. These temporary measures gave the government more discretion in procuring government funds, appointing public officials and reallocating funds. These special privileges, however were never repealed as the crisis subsided.

The high level of perceived corruption would seem to increase the probability of media exposés, but the economic crisis of the early 2000s left many media

outlets struggling and willing to accept help even if it "came with strings." These "strings" include portraying the government in a more positive light (i.e. downplaying possible corruption) in exchange for revenue from public service announcements that the government seems to delegate with discretion ("Argentina: Crisis," 2003). According to Turner (2013):

In recent years, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's government has slashed state advertising in both newspapers [*Clarín* and *La Nación*] as it lavishes money on smaller rivals, radio and television stations that support her, according to court rulings and government data on ad spending" (para. 2).

Fernández de Kirchner allegedly targets smaller media outlets that cater to provincial areas because they are the most desperate to survive. "Without state advertising it is almost impossible to survive," a radio host from the Santa Cruz province told *Global Journalist* in 2007 ("Argentina: Media," 2007, para. 3). This practice whereby the government is "favouring sympathetic media with official advertising funds and withholding those funds from media regarded as critical" leads newspapers to compete among each other for government media spending ("Argentina: Government," 2008, n. p.). Research conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists has affirmed that the Argentine government manipulates the media in this way, violating Argentina's constitution as well as the American Convention on Human Rights ("Supreme Court," 2011). In an effort to balance out the distribution of government advertisements, the Argentine Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that the government must grant official advertisement to all media ("Supreme Court," 2011).

It is suggested that the government also manipulates the media by controlling advertisement spending by outside sources. In February 2013, the commerce secretary ordered the companies that spend the most on newspaper advertising—supermarkets and electronics retailers—to stop placing ads in *Clarín* and *La Nación* (Turner, 2013). The retailers feared that if they did not comply, the government would limit their ability to import goods or perhaps would grant "spurious" tax evasion charges (Turner, 2013, para. 4). Consequently, ads placed by retailers in *Clarín* fell from 243 pages in March 2011 to five pages in March

2012, and retailer ads in *La Nación* fell respectively, from 109 to seven pages (Turner, 2013). This decrease in the placement of retailer ads may indicate the success of the government fear tactic.

In addition to manipulating advertising spending, the government has been accused of using verbal attacks against *Clarín* in particular. For example, in 2012, the aide of Guillermo Moreno, Argentina's secretary of domestic commerce, was photographed distributing socks that read "Clarín Lies" to poor children in Africa ("Con Moreno," 2012). In 2012, Fernandez de Kirchner also called a journalist for *Clarín* a "Nazi" ("Cristina Kirchner tildó," 2012). The attacks against *Clarín* have allegedly come in the form of legislation as well. The Argentine Congress passed a media law in 2009 that limits the concentration of media ownership (Turner, 2012). The stated purpose of the law is to make ownership of the media more democratic (by preventing the existence of conglomerates), and Latin American governments commonly pursue such regulations in the interest of media plurality (Paz, Sgró Ruata, & Guzmán, 2013). Critics, however, suggest that this law reflects Fernández de Kirchner's attempt to topple Grupo Clarín (Turner, 2012). The law affects 20 other media companies but significantly harms Grupo Clarín, which President Fernández de Kirchner declared owned 73% of the audiovisual media (radio, television and cable) licenses in Argentina (Americas Quarterly, 2012). The managing editor of *Clarín* was quoted as follows by *The Wall Street Journal*, "The government's goal is to reduce *Clarín's* size and limit its reach" (Turner, 2012, para. 17). In December 2013, the 2009 law to dismantle Grupo Clarín was upheld after years in appeals courts, and the media conglomerate is dividing into six smaller media organizations ("Argentina News," 2014).

Another example of legislation that affected Grupo Clarín occurred when Fernandez de Kirchner nationalized soccer coverage, taking away the exclusive broadcast rights from Grupo Clarín (Forero, 2009). This instance was well received by most, however, as it quadrupled the number of viewers from the previous season (Forero, 2009). A more drastic law passed in December 2011 lessened *Clarín's* and *La Nación's* control over newsprint and increased government control of the media, particularly of the printing press company Papel Prensa, the only printing press in Argentina (Rafsky, 2012b). The law raised productivity standards for the printing press, mandating that the government could increase its shares in the company if necessary,

in order to achieve the increase. To implement the law, the government formed a commission that consisted of representatives from every Argentine newspaper except *Clarín* and *La Nación* (Rafsky, 2012a).

On a more general level, Fernández de Kirchner passed an anti-terrorism law in 2011 that increased punishment for the crime of "inciting collective violence" and "terrorizing the public." Despite the clause specifying that the law should not interfere with citizens' rights, the law was used against an Argentine journalist in December 2013 for the first time, affirming the media's fears. Critics of this law suggest that the legislation is vague and uses undefined terms ("Newspaper," 2014, para. 3). Journalist Juan Pablo Suárez was arrested in northern Argentina for filming a violent arrest during a protest and a provincial federal court charged him with violating the Anti-Terrorism Act. Although authorities raided Suarez' newspaper offices and arrested him immediately following the video's publication, the prosecutor claimed the arrest was because Suarez was "spreading false information" (Marty, 2014, para. 5).

The progression of measures against the media may suggest that the freedom of the press is deteriorating under Fernández de Kirchner. Evidence suggests that media suppression by the government did not start during her presidency, but rather continued from her husband's presidency; Néstor Kirchner was accused of paying to manipulate the media ("Government pushes," 2008). Nevertheless, Fernández de Kirchner is perceived by some to have increased her control over the press, thereby limiting press freedom. While Fernández de Kirchner is not using technical laws of prior restraint, critics posit that she is effectively achieving the same outcome. In other words, news outlet staff believe that they are unable to print information of which Fernández de Kirchner would not approve ("Argentina: Crisis," 2003) because her government provides funding to and passes legislation in favor of media outlets that present a more favorable image of both her and the government ("Argentina: Government," 2008).

In terms of Argentina's economic stability, critics suggest that the President minimizes reported inflation rates. In other words, Argentina's inflation rate has come to be a highly disputed figure by both internal and international organizations. For example, the Argentine government, through the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), provides a much lower inflation rate from 2007 to 2014 than do outside

sources such as the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*. The discrepancy is increasing each year, to the point where the annual national inflation rate for 2012 was 10.8% according to the INDEC and 25% according to *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and the MIT Billion Prices Project, an academic initiative that partners with PriceStats to conduct high frequency price research and determine accurate inflation rates.

The government has allegedly fined economists who publish inflation data different from that of the INDEC. Secretary of Domestic Commerce Guillermo Moreno was indicted on abuse of power charges in September 2013 for engaging in this practice (“Government stands,” 2013). Fernández de Kirchner, however, denies the discrepancy in inflation statistics. She noted that if inflation were truly 25%, as independent economists calculate, her country would “explode into the air” (H. C., 2014, para. 1). Nevertheless, Argentina was the first country to be officially censured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for misreporting financial statistics (H. C., 2014). In late February of 2014, the Argentine government implemented a supposedly corrected formula for determining statistics.

## Hypothesis

It is possible that Fernandez de Kirchner’s government has acted in such a way that media bias has increased while accuracy has decreased. Thus, given their political bent, *Página/12* and *La Prensa* would likely increase their positive bias towards Fernández de Kirchner during her presidency. In addition, the traditionally anti-Kirchner media sources, *Clarín* and *La Nación*, could either become positively biased toward the president in an act of compliance with the president’s alleged manipulation, or they could become more negatively biased due to a backlash, push-back effect that often accompanies cases of political polarization (Larrabure, 2013).

I hypothesize that the pro-Kirchner media have become more positively biased toward the president, and the anti-Kirchner media have become more negatively biased toward the president. I also hypothesize that inflation figure reports by all media outlets have become more inaccurate—that *Página/12* and *La Prensa* report the inflation rate as lower than the real rate and that *Clarín* and *La Nación* report it as higher than the real rate. Thus, I generally hypothesize that the amount of bias and the degree of accuracy in

the media have changed under Fernández de Kirchner’s presidency. My null hypothesis, therefore, is that the amount of bias and the degree of accuracy in the media have *not* changed under Fernández de Kirchner’s presidency.

## Methodology

I support or refute my hypothesis by testing whether the print media have become more biased and in what direction, and by evaluating the accuracy of the inflation rate reported by the newspapers. I have chosen to review print media because it is known to be the most reliable and consistent; once an article is printed, information within it cannot be altered. Moreover, government-related problems are likely to be more pronounced in print media because of its watchdog role over the government; print media is referenced as the Fourth Estate, or fourth branch, of government in the system of checks and balances. I am also most familiar with print media because I earned a degree in the news/editorial sequence of journalism.

Bias occurs when media cast the ruling president in a positive or negative light, as opposed to a neutral light. Placement of stories within the newspapers also reflects bias; however I do not investigate this aspect because my evidence was gathered by viewing archives of articles online. I identify bias based on whether the author of the article editorializes and inserts opinion, whether he balances out sources that say good or bad things about the government, and depending upon the tone (e.g. pro- or anti-Kirchner, or neutral) with which he starts and ends the article (because frequently, the opening or closing reflects the desired theme of the article).

The timeline of this study is 2004–2013 because it establishes a baseline before Fernández de Kirchner’s presidency from which to evaluate change during her presidency. Fernández de Kirchner assumed presidency in December 2007. The timeline also includes a series of important events related to the relationships that media sources have with one another and with the government, as well as legislation and other methods of manipulation, as detailed in the previous section.

Some of the newspapers lacked search engines that could narrow the search to a specific topic, so instead I examined every newspaper issue from a certain day. In order to be consistent, I searched every third Wednesday of every fourth month (every January,

May, and September) to compare news articles. I chose this method because I considered three series of data (more than 2,000 articles) from each year to be enough to determine a trend in a newspaper. One limitation is that I was not able to analyze every article of every issue for each newspaper. By choosing Wednesday, I avoided weekends and most holidays, and I was more likely to get a more accurate assessment in case the beginning and ends of the month were more politically sensitive.

I examined one section from each newspaper from every issue I systematically chose, and I chose the section that had the most articles pertaining to domestic politics, so as to include articles about the president. For *Página/12*, I evaluated the “country” section. For *La Prensa*, I evaluated all the articles with a “politics” label. The discrepancy in the number of articles in *La Prensa* is because the paper expanded its online archives dramatically in 2008. For *Clarín*, I evaluated the “country” section, although I did have to switch to the “politics” section when the archival format changed and the “country” section disappeared and became the “politics” section in 2012, before soon switching back. For *La Nación*, that section remained the “politics” section throughout the 10-year span.

I logged the newspapers, dates, article titles and my evaluation of bias in annexes (not included in this paper). When evaluating articles, I first determined whether the article topics were relevant to my investigation; I marked them as “relevant” or “irrelevant”. I determined they were relevant if they mentioned the president. When Néstor Kirchner served as president, I only deemed articles relevant if they talked about Néstor Kirchner. When Fernández de Kirchner was in power, from December 2007 on, I included former president Néstor Kirchner’s name only if the author used it to refer to traits or “kirchnerista” ideologies they both had. I included the terms “*el/la presidente*” (the president), “*ejecutivo*” (executive), “*poder ejecutivo*” (executive power) and the “*la jefa/el jefe del estado*” (head of the country) and similar terms as direct references. I used discretion in cases of “*estado*” or “*estado nacional*” (the state), *kirchnerista* (ideology), “*gobierno*” (government), related terms, and actions of the ministers in the president’s Cabinet, who are appointed by the president and act in his/her capacity. I then formally identified neutral, positive or negative bias toward the president by the manners I previously mentioned. I also noted the proportion of relevant articles, as opposed to irrelevant articles,

in case a sharp change affected the bias trends. For example, a pro-Kirchner paper could avoid telling bad news involving a president so that it simply reports on him/her less often.

One possible confounding variable in the analyses included the variation in the number of articles per issue, or the growth or shrinkage of the newspapers over time. I accounted for this by noting the proportion of relevant articles with neutral, positive or negative bias out of the total number of the articles in the section I evaluated. I entered that proportion into a chart and generated the graphs below to determine percent change in positive, neutral and negative bias over time in the newspapers.

In order to determine whether the accuracy of the information, and therefore the newspaper’s large-scale credibility, had changed, I searched for inflation figures reported by each newspaper. I compared these with the government-reported rates, which, since 2007, have been significantly reported as lower than they actually were, according to the CIA *World Factbook*, the IMF and the World Bank. I determined that investigating reported inflation rates was the best test of accuracy because there are reliable third-party sources with private estimates with which to crosscheck the numbers: *The World Factbook*, the IMF and the MIT Billion Prices Project. The Argentine government reports a rate through the INDEC, el Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (The National Institute of Statistics and Census); thus it would be easy to note which newspapers were relaying incorrect government information, and which were providing accurate information from outside sources. Also, the inflation rate is one of the most highly controversial statistics in the IMF and within Argentina itself.

One obstacle in this study was that the search engine for *Página/12* did not have a date range option; as a result, I searched by topic and scrolled through all dates in chronological order. The others did have a date range option but the searched articles were not easily navigable. Also, I could not search *La Prensa* for articles before January 2006 because previous editions were not posted online. Fernández de Kirchner did not assume the presidency until December 2007; while this provides almost two years to establish a trend before her presidency, it does not fully coincide with my 2004-2013 timeline.

## Findings

Figure 1. *Página 12*: Trend Line for Percentage of Relevant Articles per Issue

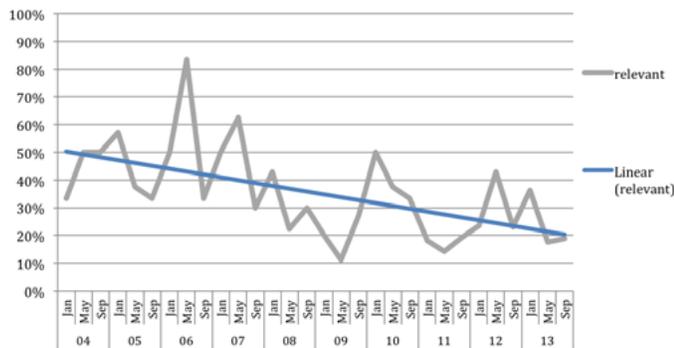
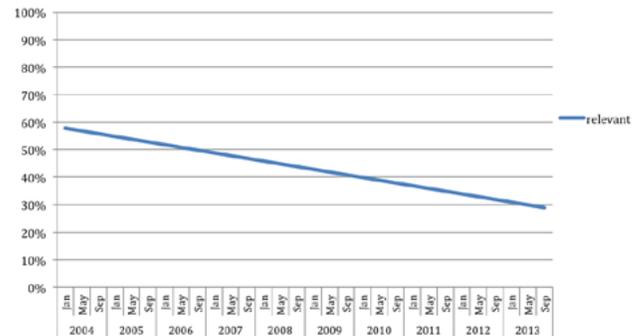


Figure 3. *La Prensa*: Trend Line for Percentage of Relevant Articles per Issue



The evidence did not support my hypothesis that the print media had become more biased during the period of 2004–2014. Each paper turned out to have a different trend. I discuss the results for each of the papers separately.

**Página/12.** *Página/12*, known for casting the Kirchners in a positive light, tended to report about Néstor or Fernández de Kirchner less and less throughout the 10-year span. This could be attributed to Fernández de Kirchner’s falling popularity and a pattern of suspicious and luxurious spending, bribes, offending other countries, economic decline, and other problems that arose throughout the years. However, because *La Nación* is the only newspaper whereby the relevancy rate did not decline, I speculate that from 2004 to 2013, most newspapers tended to report less on the president and increasingly more on other leaders, issues, and events.

Between 2004 and 2013, the number of

*Página/12* articles involving the president decreased from 50% to 20%. This means that the newspaper increasingly left the president out of the discussion regarding issues on which it reported. If the issues were similar from 2004 to 2013, then this would suggest bias by omission. For example, if a government corruption scandal broke, it is possible that *Página/12* still covered the issue just like the other newspapers, but that it avoided implicating the president in the scandal. If the positively biased papers reported on negative news without bringing the president’s name into the negative news, then this would be a type of positive bias for which my research did not account.

The proportion of neutral relevant articles in *Página/12* increased throughout the years from 38% to 83%. The number of negative articles increased only slightly, by 6%. The number of positive articles dropped more drastically, from 44% in 2004 to 10% in 2012. This was contrary to my hypothesis. I had expected the newspaper to cast the president in a more positive than negative light, which it did by a margin of 40% in 2004. However, I did not expect the negative bias to increase,

Figure 2. *Página 12*: Trend Lines for Percentage of Articles with Bias per Issue

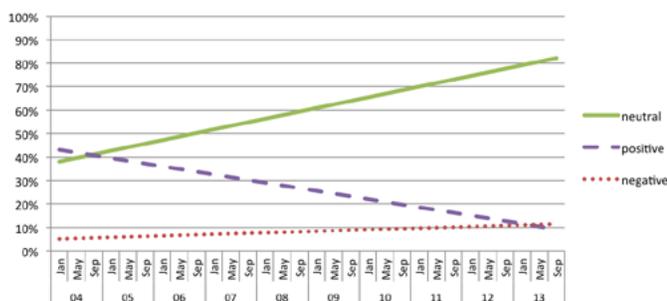


Figure 4. *La Prensa*: Trend Lines for Percentage of Articles with Bias per Issue

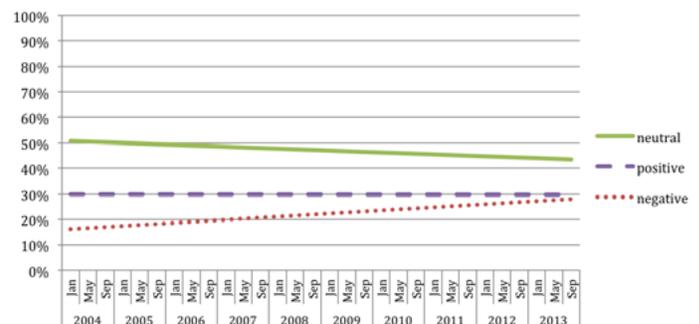
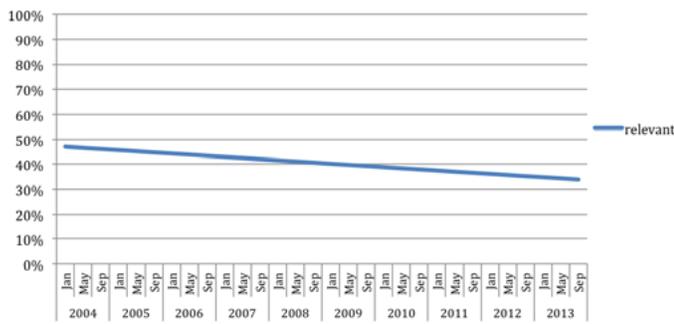


Figure 5. Clarín: Trend Line for Percentage of Relevant Articles per Issue



albeit slightly, nor did I predict that the positive bias would decrease over time but expected it to increase substantially. However, because the newspaper wrote about the president less, the omission could factor into these results. Further research needs to be conducted to delve deeper into manifestations of bias in the newsprint media.

**La Prensa.** According to Figure 3, *La Prensa*, the other traditionally positively biased newspaper, experienced an almost identical drop in the number of relevant articles, from 58% in 2004 to 29% in 2013 (29% as opposed to *Página/12*'s 30% decrease). Similarly, this suggests bias by omission may have occurred.

According to Figure 4, *La Prensa*, experienced less change in bias than *Página/12*. The number of positively biased articles stayed the same while the number of neutral articles decreased slightly, by 7%, and the number of negative articles increased by 23%. *La Prensa* is the only newspaper in which no trends were significant enough to merit intersecting lines.

**Clarín.** Transitioning into the traditionally anti-Kirchner newspapers, *Clarín* and *La Nación* had a less

Figure 6. Clarín: Trend Lines for Percentage of Articles with Bias per Issue

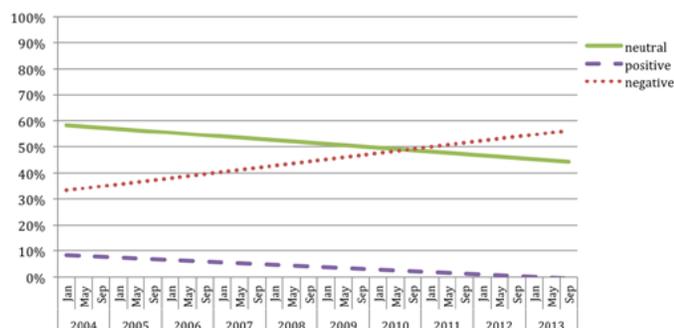
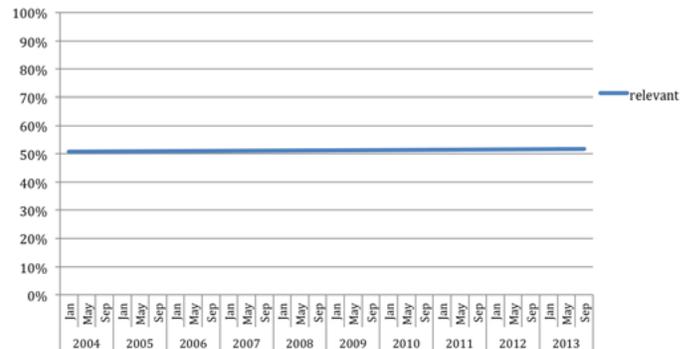


Figure 7. La Nación: Trend Line for Percentage of Relevant Articles per Issue



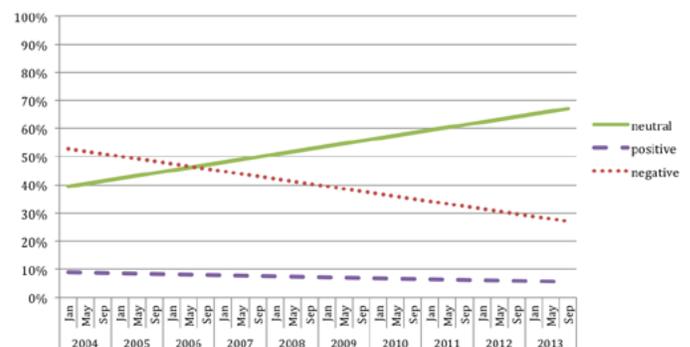
drastic drop in relevance of articles (please see Figure 5). *Clarín* experienced a 14% decrease, as opposed to approximately 30% for *Página/12* and *La Prensa*, in terms of relevance. This suggests less bias by omission, although a traditionally negatively biased article could potentially leave the president's name out of good news and thus result in bias in the opposite way.

According to Figure 6, *Clarín* had a unique correlation between neutral and negative articles. The proportion of negative articles rose to surpass that of neutral articles, which were falling simultaneously. The number of positive articles decreased. *Clarín* is the only newspaper that supports my hypothesis because its bias grew less positive and neutral and more negative over the years. This finding was not surprising given the recent federal legislation to dismantle *Clarín* and the fight between Grupo Clarín and Fernández de Kirchner.

**La Nación.** According to Figure 7, *La Nación* consistently had the same number of relevant articles per issue. This suggests a lack of change in bias, so in other words, neutrality.

According to Figure 8, *La Nación*, on the other

Figure 8. La Nación: Trend Lines for Percentage of Articles with Bias per Issue



hand, showed a large drop in negative articles from 53% in 2004 to 27% in 2013. Positive articles decreased by only 3%, and neutral articles increased by 32%. These findings, combined with the flat trend line of relevant articles, indicate that *La Nación*, in terms of change in bias, is the least affected of the four newspapers in terms of Fernández de Kirchner's alleged methods of control.

## Discussion and Limitations

I speculate there may be a small margin of error in my bias detection because my understanding of the Argentine political system increased over time. Therefore, perhaps I became better able to identify bias over time. If I were to conduct further research, I would blindly evaluate the same articles again and see how consistently I determined neutral, positive, or negative bias.

I expected to find an increase in positive bias and a decrease in negative bias among the traditionally pro-Kirchner papers, *Página/12* and *La Prensa*; however, my findings did not support my hypothesis. I also hypothesized that both *Clarín* and *La Nación* would have fewer positive articles and more negative articles. I expected Fernández de Kirchner's alleged attempts to control the media would cause the pro-Kirchner papers to publish more positively biased articles toward the government and fewer negative articles. I then expected a polarization, or push-back effect, but this did not occur either. The evidence is more consistent with the view that the editors of *La Nación* were trying to become a credible, neutral paper that citizens could turn to for accurate information instead of offering more polarized articles.

To determine accuracy in the reported inflation rates, I recorded the sources of the inflation figures that each paper reported. I hypothesized that the traditionally pro-Kirchner papers would publish the lower inflation figures that corresponded with the official INDEC calculations rather than with the higher private estimates. I hypothesized that they would identify that a discrepancy existed, but still publish the government's numbers as credible. I expected that the traditionally anti-Kirchner papers would publish figures closer to that of the government's INDEC rate, and if so, only to show the discrepancy between that rate and a much higher rate they would claim to be the credible one.

It turns out, the data were more difficult to

analyze than I had predicted. For instance, it was difficult to find credible sources with which to compare because the Argentine inflation rate is so controversial. For example, the World Bank did not have inflation numbers for 2008 through 2013. The IMF had dashes in the boxes for recent inflation rate statistics for Argentina, noting that the government rates are not credible. In addition, the *CIA World Factbook* explicitly stated that the official estimates were underreported and inaccurate.

In terms of inferring trends in the accuracy of the newspapers' reporting, most often the papers specified whether they were simply relaying the government's INDEC information or using private estimates. So the assertions they made were accurate almost 100% of the time because of the source to which they attributed it.

I kept a chart of the numbers each paper listed for each year, to compare with independent estimates, however in most instances, the newspaper listed multiple figures from different sources. So even if I were to infer bias by how many times a newspaper cited a certain source, there was no definitive way to accurately find and record every instance that an annual inflation rate was mentioned. In addition, not all the papers I reviewed had search engines with the option to filter by date.

Moreover, the *CIA World Factbook*, the IMF, and the MIT Billion Prices Project either did not release inflation figures for Argentina during certain years between 2004 and 2013 or the figures varied among the sources. For example, in 2008, the *World Factbook* reported an official rate of 7.2 and an unofficial rate of 22%; the IMF did not report a figure, and the MIT project reported 23.5%.

Because of the inability to include every article that mentioned inflation rates in the four newspapers, and because of the discrepancy in the reports of the inflation rate by reliable third-party sources, the study of the newspaper reports of the annual inflation rate was inconclusive. I could not determine whether the newspapers had become more or less accurate and could not establish a correlation between accuracy and the increasing influence of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner on the media.

## Conclusion

I hypothesized that media bias would increase in Argentinean print media during the presidency of

Fernández de Kirchner because of her government's ability to penalize media that publish unfavorable news. I measured bias in four Buenos Aires newspapers, but found that the bias increased in just one of the four papers. Inflation rate evidence to measure media accuracy was inconclusive. Consequently, the evidence fails to support my hypothesis.

Further research on media bias in Argentina is needed. In addition to this study, published articles about censorship in Argentina have focused on the relationship between Grupo Clarín and the government. What is needed are studies that focus on specific issues, such as the aforementioned smuggling of money into Argentina, allegedly for Fernández de Kirchner's campaign. Coverage of such issues by each of the four papers should be studied in detail. This approach will allow researchers to better determine if a newspaper is omitting one side of an issue, including more sources that support one view, selecting stories that coincide with a pro- or anti-Kirchner agenda (for example, labeling political figures in ways that affect their credibility), and/or 'spinning' stories to only show one interpretation. Researchers can count the instances in which a newspaper publishes stories about a single event.

Another dimension that needs analysis in determining bias is placement of stories within the newspapers. Again, because I used online archives I was unable to examine which stories made the front page, had the biggest type and pictures, and so on. Even if two newspapers published similar articles, if one emphasized the articles that cast the president in a negative light by putting them on the front page in bold and the other placed them in the back and put a positively biased story on the front page instead, then this would be a clearer indication of bias.

Future researchers can also examine the hard copy of the newspaper to count the number of government ads placed in the paper. As a result, they could determine whether there is a correlation between the number of ads and the number of positive articles about the government. This issue is extremely relevant given the verbal warning from the government in 2013 whereby supermarkets were told to stop publishing ads in critical newspapers (Turner, 2013).

Despite the inconclusive results of this study, Latin America as a whole seems to be trending toward restricting the media (Karkekar, 2012). According to *Americas Quarterly*, "Freedom of speech remains a contested right in most democracies across the

Americas" (Rodríguez, 2013, para. 1). Part of this is because there is fairly high public support in these countries for censoring politically damaging news. Colombia, Ecuador, and El Salvador take the lead of American countries with nearly 37% public support for the government censorship of politically damaging news, according to 2012 data (Rodríguez, 2013). Argentina, however, ranks second lowest, with a public approval rate just 3.5% higher than that of the U.S. (Rodríguez, 2013). This statistic provides some hope that Argentina can reverse any adverse effects from manipulation of the media under the Fernández de Kirchner regime.

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