ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: RELIGION COVERAGE AS A CONDUIT FOR DISINFORMATION AND EXCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA

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Past literature on religion and news media focused on whether secular news coverage is disadvantageous to religion but this dissertation explored the opposite approach: whether secular coverage of religion can favor religion (compared to coverage of the marginalized groups whose rights are often under attack by religious institutions) and amplify religious disinformation. This analysis also sought to determine how religious disinformation may spread through fact-based media and whether any differences surface between legacy and emerging outlets reporting.

Coverage of a specific political process (issuance of a technical norm to guide the conditions under which abortion to save a patient's life or health can be conducted) involving religious groups and a marginalized group (women) was chosen for analysis in a Latin American country (Costa Rica) known for a free press and stable democratic rule, but also a majority Christian population. A mixed-methods content analysis of the coverage was conducted based on newer approaches to media pluralism theory, which has been often invoked in the region to

discuss unequal media access and its implications on the balance of power relations in a democratic arena.

Results suggest religion coverage was a conduit for the spread of disinformation through fact-based news outlets and the spread of marginalizing narratives about women's rights. While not all disinformation came from religious sources, the majority did and the press repeated religious disinformation twice as often as non-religious disinformation. The majority of all the disinformation included in the news stories was not identified as such. In most cases, it was religious disinformation that many reporters failed to fact-check. Furthermore, they gave religious sources and their messages prominent positions in the articles, even when they included disinformation.

Religious sources in the sample benefitted from a permissive coverage marked by a "silk glove" treatment by several news outlets, which enabled them to prominently spread disinformation and reaffirm exclusionary narratives. No relevant differences emerged in coverage by legacy and emerging news outlets in this regard.

This dissertation contributes a case-based definition of religious disinformation and a new coding scheme that can be used to analyze media pluralism under newer theoretical conceptualizations that focus on the interaction of journalism with power asymmetries rather than measures of diversity.

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by

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Dedication

To my mom.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Religion Coverage and Media Pluralism in Latin America

Section 1: The Tension Between Religion and the News Media

The literature about religion and the news media has long focused on exploring complaints by religious actors about alleged biases against specific denominations and perceived hostility against religion in general. Some research has focused on whether journalists apply a pro-religion stance in their coverage (Buddenbaum, 2010), or whether religious coverage increased or decreased in connection with social and political phenomena. Other research explored the framing of different denominations and religions (Powell, 2011; Terman, 2017; Hill et al., 2001), journalists' religious beliefs, and the topoi or "moral formulas" such as good works, hypocrisy, tolerance, false prophesy, and inclusion to report on religion (Silk, 1998; Kerr, 2003).

A recurring debate is whether patterns observed in coverage are reflective of broader societal patterns about religion, or, as religious authors claim, the result of a secular bias, an "a-religious" worldview, or "contempt" for religion (Silk 1991, p. 36; Buddenbaum, 2010). Studies by Catholic groups in the 1990s analyzed news of elite U.S. news organizations. They did not find evidence of journalistic hostility against religion. However, they concluded that sources favoring the Catholic Church's views on sexual morality, church-state relations, and "Church authority" tended to be in the minority in news stories. The study authors concluded that "journalists frequently

approached this subject matter from a secular perspective, structuring their coverage of theological issues along the familiar lines of political reportage" (Shaw, 1993).

Some scholars offered an alternative explanation, pointing to how secular coverage simply conforms to facts and reflects a social landscape in which the Church's views on many issues are indeed a minority (Winston, 2012). However, religiously-inclined authors and media critics see covering religion with a secular perspective per se as problematic and a way to "reward" dissent with religious views (Buddenbaum, 2009, p. 47; Shaw, 1993). For Winston, mainstream media's focus on covering religion through its institutions and powerful leaders "marginalizes what some adherents and religion scholars say are the most intriguing and dynamic aspects of belief and believing... Clergy sexual abuse and denominational debates over gay ordination fit the definition of newsworthiness. Still, they don't illuminate the mystery of prayer or the impact of small group fellowship" (2012, p. 14). Shaw argues that non-religious media give "copious and respectful" attention to voices who dissent with the Catholic doctrine. In Shaw's view this can spark more dissent. Olasky goes as far as suggesting the press should follow an "overarching perspective, such as Christianity's worldview," and proposes the use of "engaged, perspectival reporting anchored in the reporter’s religious worldview" (Buddenbaum, 2010, p. 47; Schultze, 2003, p. 276-277).

One necessary implication of such arguments is that the press should cover religion to promote aspects of it such as "belief and believing" as news, even if they lack news value, which falls closer to public relations and proselytizing campaigns than to professional journalism. Furthermore, such suggestions seem to confuse

journalistic balance and fairness with deliberately cherry-picking perspectives to manufacture a favorable portrayal of religion and discourage or silence dissent with religious doctrine, calculations that have no place in journalism's values and standards.

This dissertation argues that such positions miss the distinction between religion as a spiritual experience in the private sphere and religion as organizations with political agendas active in the public sphere, two dimensions that have important implications on newsworthiness. Religious activity in the private sphere can sometimes be covered as human-interest features. Still, religion as a political actor is newsworthy because of its potential impact on the public interest. That is, covering political action by religious groups or leaders is necessary for citizens to be informed about developments that may impact them, but it does not create a journalistic duty to help religious groups with parochial aims such as "illuminating the mystery of prayer" or controlling dissent among their ranks and followers.

Contrary to the many complaints of alleged anti-religious bias, media critics have long observed pro-religion views in secular news stories. Such cases may be more visible around certain events, such as visits by the Pope. After such a visit to the U.S. in 1979, historian Garry Wills wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that “the press went belly-up” and "instead of reporting the papal visit, journalists celebrated it like a pack of acolytes," at the expense of issues like the Vatican's rejection of ordaining women or the fact that most Americans disagree with the Church's views on birth control and abortion.

As an example of the press' complicity in maintaining an air of make-believe around the pope's visit, Wills mentioned that when the Chicago Tribune questioned exaggerated crowd estimates of one million people in Grant Park, a radio commentator criticized the story as an attempt 'to try and take some of the gloss off of the papal visit'" (Wills, 1980). Journalists' religious reverence and even adulation for a religious figure were also noted in 2008 when a later Pope visited the U.S. An article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* said, "a papal visit seems to put stars in some reporters' eyes" and noted how comedian John Stewart had "a lot of fun mocking the media over the fawning coverage they gave the Pope's visit" (Rose, 2008).

Pro-religion bias has been studied to a much lesser extent in several areas of academic endeavor in the U.S. and Latin America. Silk's words may be valid for the media and academia when he states that "religion stands outside of the established order, at least officially, and woe to those who treat it with disrespect" (Silk, 1991, p. 3).

Understanding journalism's coverage of religion in the U.S. is relevant to the Latin American context of interest to this dissertation because the journalistic culture in the region has adopted the American model of professional journalism. In Winston's characterization of U.S. religion coverage in earlier centuries, the press "cited clergy as authoritative sources, and frequently published ministers' opinions on the issues of the day." That characterization continues to be relevant in Latin America as these traits are still observed in news outlets across the region. Literature about religion and the media in Latin American countries is limited and affected by a pro-

religious - especially pro-Catholic - slant that has affected the study of different dimensions of religion (Frigerio, 2018).

One reason why it is important to study religion and the media is that religion is not just a matter of belief but also a political force, and news can impact how religious groups construct their public presence. This means religion can manifest itself in the news cycle in its experiential dimension as faith, spirituality, and denominational values, but also as a subset of politics. This includes the electoral and policy processes and the internal politics of religious institutions and their leaders – along with their agendas against the human rights of marginalized groups such as women or LGBT citizens. Religion's political dimension typically receives more coverage, and the evidence suggests this practice can affect how the public perceives religion, given journalism's roles in setting news agendas, reinforcing the status quo, and maintaining cultural hegemony. "Decisions about sourcing, reporting, and framing stories do more than convey information; they mainstream certain issues, ideas, and personalities while marginalizing others (...) In conjunction with issues of time, space, and resources, decisions about newsworthiness can skew public perceptions about fundamental religious tenets" (Winston, 2012, p. 14-15).

In that sense, beyond the concerns of religious media critics and religious organizations about negative or insufficient coverage lies a recognition that news coverage can legitimate and strengthen certain actors over others, and that frames, understood as context communicated with a text, can project greater or lesser relevance of an actor or issue (Kerr, 2002). In Kerr's words, such projections are a form of social power that, according to studies in the religion and media field, have

been used to cast certain religious communities in certain ways. For example, as outsiders when coverage refers to religious groups as a minority with characteristics that frame them as the "other." In other cases, frames have served to define what types or levels of religious dogma and rituals can be considered mainstream in society.

Stout explains that "knowing what type of information is out there is very important given that treatment of religious groups is tied to the kinds of information available to citizens" (Stout, 2003, p. 2). The literature shows that positive frames have helped facilitate revivalism and religious fervor in the late 19th century U.S. while negative ones contributed to ostracizing and persecuting Jews in Nazi Germany (Stout, 2003). Stout argues that "there is some relation between media framing and social processes such as religious assimilation and accommodation," as well as the ups and downs of religion's cultural hegemony that have long concerned religious institutions and leaders.

This dissertation also argues that coverage of religion can also be a form of political power - as is discussed later on from the perspective of media pluralism theory - and this makes it especially relevant to study in the current context, with the explosion of religious-political ambition across Latin America in the first two decades of the 21st Century and their political objectives.

Historically, because of its colonizing past, the Catholic Church carved a place for itself among the political elites in most countries in the Latin American region. This has allowed it to enjoy extensive amplification of its messages by the mainstream press and its own religious media networks. On the other hand,

Evangelical groups established themselves in the region gradually as independence and individual freedoms spread throughout the continent and weakened the Catholic hold over the bulk of the population. However, for a long time, evangelicals failed to penetrate the political elites. They found a way to mobilize crowds and leverage them electorally by creating religious political parties as well as creating alliances with secular political parties.

By 2021, evangelical politicians held substantial legislative blocks in countries like Brazil, Perú, and Costa Rica; helped shift a referendum result in Colombia; and reached the presidency or have close links to the Executive in countries like Guatemala, Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela (Lissardy, 2018; Protestante Digital, 2020; Zilla, 2020; GDA, 2019). Catholics' and evangelicals' political ambition relies heavily on a "pro-family" and "moral" agenda, attacking women's right to abortion when complicated pregnancies put their lives and health in danger, same-sex marriage, trans rights, and sex education in public schools. The rivalry that long existed in the region between Catholic and evangelical organizations has given way to transnational, joint communication campaigns using many of the same slogans and hashtags across countries, of which disinformation and inflammatory rhetoric are key characteristics. An example of common disinformation by religious groups is that abortion is never necessary to save a woman's life because of alleged medical advances that can save “the two lives” – a type of disinformation that they have popularized with the hashtag #PorLasDosVidas (#ForTheTwoLives). Another example is the idea that acknowledging the existence of trans individuals in

sex education encourages children to change their sex (Provost and Archer, 2020; Barquero, 2019; Briceño, 2017).

Thus, the religious-political landscape in the region has changed to one where evangelical political parties hold public office to exercise formal political power to promote laws and policies favorable to their views and, conversely, to oppose those that do not, while the Catholic Church uses its political capital to organize marches, communication campaigns, political preaching during church services, news coverage, and lobby high-level officials. As a result, "pro-family" or "moral" issues have become "hot topics" both during electoral campaigns and in between campaigns, when related bills or executive decrees are discussed and drive significant news coverage. Because of the media visibility that religious groups enjoy, some of their disinformation extends beyond the pulpit and social media channels and into the fact-based news flows.

The inflow of disinformation into the fact-based news stream is a broader phenomenon. Some studies suggest that news consumers are more exposed to disinformation inadvertently injected into fact-based news media than through shady websites or anonymous content on social media (Guo and Vargo, 2018; Gruszczynski and Wagner, 2017). This can occur when the news media amplifies false information, such as when headlines and leads emphasize inaccurate or partly false information provided by high-level sources, or when headlines portray false information as factual and later clarify it as incorrect instead of leading with factual information (Sullivan, 2018; Lakoff, 2018). It may also occur when journalists fall into false equivalency fallacies, such as quoting fringe voices who disseminate false information as if they

were equivalent to facts or expertise (Edelson, 2012; Battistoli, 2017; Grimes, 2016). Furthermore, some studies have found intermedia agenda-setting effects, in which fake news agendas help shape the agendas of the fact-based news media (Guo and Vargo, 2018; Gruszczynski and Wagner, 2017).

Before ultraconservative neo-Pentecostals grew politically in Latin America, they were often covered as a nuisance because of their "garage-churches" and eventually large marquee tents designed to fit thousands of people, or as a fraud, because of their claims of performing "healing" and "miracles" in front of live audiences (Pérez, 2017, p. 20). Now that they hold public office, their actions and messages may get as much coverage as any other political elite.

Evangelical political evolution in Latin America is primarily the creation of American religious organizations and their missionaries that spread throughout the region to create congregations, some organically and some propelled by American administrations who saw them as assets used to neutralize the Catholic Church when the political interests of the latter were not aligned with those of U.S. governments (Cuevas, 2022). These congregations prepared local leaders to follow "an American-formulated gospel" in which political ambition is a central part of the "mission" (Melkonian-Hoover and Hoover, 2008). For this reason, evangelicals in the region have gone from fighting for religious freedom to demanding religious equality with Catholicism to now aiming for political power of higher stature than both the Catholic Church and secular political parties (Pérez, 2017, p. 20).

"This marriage of pastors and parties is not a Latin American invention. It has been happening in the United States since the 1980s, as the Christian right gradually

became arguably the most reliable constituency in the Republican Party," and "American evangelicals coach their counterparts in Latin America on how to court parties, become lobbyists" (Corrales, 2018). As in the U.S., where ultraconservatives have taken over the Republican party (Newsinger, 2020; Williams, 2010; Nelson, 2021), right-wing parties in Latin America have been a natural fit for neo-Pentecostals where they "are solving the most serious political handicap that right-wing parties have in Latin America: their lack of ties with nonelites (...) They are bringing in voters from all walks of life, but mostly the poor. They are turning right-wing parties into people's parties" (Corrales, 2018). Right-wing elites' priorities usually are economic, while religious elites focus on a "moral agenda" characterized by the negation of human rights on issues of sex, reproductive rights, marriage, and family. This sets the table for conservatives to trade human rights for their economic agenda. As a result, much of the political debate has reduced complex social and political issues to "good" versus "evil" in which, under the rule of political coalitions "capable of infringing on rights that protect a pluralistic society and democracy," parts of society that have been historically excluded lose the progress they gained in the previous decades (Parnell, 2019).

As can be seen, this dissertation is not focused on religion as a matter of faith, as it is understood that individuals have a right to freely adopt and live by their chosen beliefs. Rather, it is focused on organized religion seeking political power to code their religious beliefs into laws and policies, which are then imposed on all citizens without respect to each person's choice of religious belief and/or their freedom to not have any religious belief whatsoever.

Section 2: Religion, Media, and Inequality in Latin America

This new political-religious context reinforces deeply-rooted inequalities in Latin America that religion and conservative politicians seek to maintain or deepen. How the news media covers these issues - amplifying certain voices and silencing others - can have important implications for the power that the groups involved in a given political process gain, retain, or lose.

In Latin America's post-colonial social hierarchy, women, natives, LGBT, blacks, etc., are at the bottom of the totem pole. At the same time, "white male elites" dominate political and economic power, as well as academia and the media (Ferreira, 2006). This has produced what Ferreira calls "socially structured silences" inherited from the post-colonial rule by both the Spanish conquerors and the Catholic Church, which for centuries held "exclusive monopolies over public channels for the distribution of knowledge." They also pushed a systematic degradation of natives, women, and (eventually imported) enslaved Africans that has remained deeply ingrained in the Latin American culture and social order (Ferreira, 2006).

"From Europe, Latin America inherited a structural colonial censorship built on at least four pillars: racism, official intimidation, technological elitism, and ideological intolerance." The censorship was also built on a social hierarchy that regarded women as "intellectually inferior, prone to error and evil," destined to "keep silent" and written out of the history books (Ferreira, 2006, p. 42). These "socially structured silences" have been reflected in the Latin American press, partly because of the collusive relationships between media owners and the political elites, which the former needed to survive in small markets and unstable, often authoritarian political

systems. Even though journalism has been theorized as a service to the public interest, a core component of democratic checks and balances, and a voice for those "without a voice," the news media also represent a complex interplay of economic, political, and social forces. Furthermore, journalists are active parts of their cultures and social norms, "fear social opprobrium and internalize the assumptions of their culture" and are, in essence, "products of their times" (Perloff, 2000, p. 327). As the literature shows, even in environments of democratic, independent journalism, the media can not only fail to fulfill its mission with regard to marginalized groups but can also help silence, demonize, and symbolically annihilate them, perpetuating conditions of exclusion and abuse (Tuchman, 2000; Perloff, 2000).

"Media critics, historians and communications researchers offer evidence to support what William Lloyd Garrison said about the press and the Abolitionists, what Susan B. Anthony said about the press and the suffragists, and what Upton Sinclair said about the press and the Socialists. All three claimed that non-institutionalized groups whose ideas and goals challenge prevailing societal and political beliefs are often denied access to the press (...) If the reader is to get a representative picture of society, the newspaper must open its pages to the activities and ideas of a variety of groups within the society" (Kessler, 1980, p. 598). However, the literature also demonstrates that the news media can play a catalytic role in advancing social change by "giving" a voice to silenced or abused groups by legitimizing their claims and demanding accountability for abuse of power.

The evolution toward stable democratic rule in Latin America has also fostered the formation of independent media systems that adopted the American

model of the press, resulting in a journalistic culture that privileges the aspirations of objectivity and neutrality. However, while it is true that Latin American journalism articulates the concepts of social justice and media plurality as a core mission, it is also possible to argue that it tends to explain them more as functions of class struggles between elites and "the people" than as phenomena underpinned by identity politics and the marginalization of some groups within “the people.” Rooted in a class struggle framework shaped during the Communism-capitalism debates of the 20th Century, "the people" have been more commonly associated with labor unions, farmers groups, the poor, etc. than with socially excluded groups within "the people," such as women, LGBT, natives, blacks, etc. (Sandoval-García, 2008; Cannon, 2016). As such, being the "voice of the voiceless" has traditionally been exercised through the coverage of the problems that affect the former (labor unions, farmers groups, the poor, etc.) much more than the latter (women, LGBT, natives, blacks, etc.).

"The making of cultural identity in the Latin American nations have involved reversing the negation of the indigenous, the mestizo, the peasant, the marginal, and, of course, women. A new cultural understanding of what citizenship means has emerged in the new democracies of the 1990s and, in particular, in the new social movements organized by women, the landless and the urban marginal, among others" (Jones and Munck, 2000, p. 191). This has been the case in journalism and, more generally, in the evolution of understanding who is a citizen. Access to the news media, especially to being represented – or ignored – in it, is still an open question in the region that has often been discussed under a media pluralism framework. More specifically, it has been discussed around the media ownership component, perhaps

because the region has often been considered the most concentrated media market in the world. However, this dissertation argues that ownership is a function of intraclass power struggles - focusing on whether one political elite or another has disproportionate power or influence over the mainstream media - and that, while important, it fails to account for the "socially structured silences" referenced above, projected and often legitimized by the media.

Some scholars in the region have warned that even if the issue of media concentration could be solved, it “would not necessarily lead to more diversity and plurality of voices,” but not much progress seems to have been made on how to address and tackle this gap (Podesta, 2016, p. 3-4; Mendel, 2017, p. 19). In practice, media ownership continues to be branded as a solution while acknowledging that ownership won't solve media pluralism problems. This gap has become more sensitive with the intensification of religious and right-wing groups' attacks against marginalized groups in the age of digital communications.

Politically speaking, "gender ideology" is a political platform that uses new wording to reiterate outdated attacks against women's equality of rights/opportunities and LGBT rights such as same-sex marriage and recognition of the transexual identity. Joint campaigns by Catholic and evangelical groups described above and executed in partnership with right-wing politicians "seek to continue controlling sexuality and reproduction (…) This is not casual, as through the years, fundamental changes have occurred across the region in sexual and reproductive rights, through holistic sexual education, some forms of legal abortion, homosexual couple's right to adopt children, homosexual marriage, and others, changes these fundamentalist

groups oppose" (González et al., 2018, p. 5). Under the "gender ideology" tag, religious and conservative elites essentially push a renewed form of biological determinism according to which roles traditionally assigned to the sexes are set by nature and cannot be modified. Religious conservatives have positioned any deviation from their belief-based prescriptions as attacks on family and on their Christian values, concepts that religious groups have historically felt entitled to define for all groups of society as if they were all part of their churches or followers of their brand of Christianity.

Digital technologies have played an important role in spreading and amplifying religious messages that often rely on the use of disinformation (such as, “abortion is never necessary to save women’s lives”) and religious condemnation (such as, “gender ideology is the work of the devil”). Inflammatory rhetoric plays well with social media algorithms and online and offline fundamentalist/conservative channels (T.V. shows, documents, graphic magazines, religious ceremonies, marches, religious schools, and lobbying) (González et al., 2018). However, inflammatory rhetoric can also be appealing for news media outlets seeking to attract larger audiences which, together with Latin American journalism's habit of giving religious elites prominent coverage, can enable religious groups to insert disinformation and exclusionary rhetoric into the news stream.

Section 3: Pluralism and Communicative Power

Instead of joining the choir of research examining whether complaints by religious actors about news coverage have any merit or entertaining debates about

whether journalism should apply softer standards to cover religion, this dissertation explores how the coverage of religious actors compares to the coverage of other actors in the context of a specific political process in a Latin American country. More specifically, using a media pluralism framework, it explores whether news coverage of religion can serve as a conduit for the spread of disinformation and marginalizing narratives, with implications on the balance of power relations in a democratic arena. The analysis also explores whether coverage by emerging media outlets - which have introduced more ownership and source diversity to the media ecosystems- shows any differences with coverage by legacy media in terms of pluralism.

Media pluralism has been thoroughly debated in democratic political systems because of the media's - and particularly journalism's - role in enabling and supporting a free and robust public debate arena in which all can participate. Public debate is essential to any democratic system, as groups are meant to be able to organize and compete with others to influence political power in public affairs that directly or indirectly affect them.

This essential function of journalism has led to regarding it as different than other goods and services and as deserving of special protections and regulations to guarantee the existence of media pluralism, even if there is a general understanding that “complete equality of actual communicative power" is not achievable (Baker, 2007, p. 10). Such measures recognize that, in practice, it is not realistic to assume that in a free marketplace of ideas, those with better arguments will gather larger audiences and prevail. On the one hand, those who control the media exercise more significant influence over what audiences will pay attention to, and, on the other,

individuals from marginalized groups face more challenges due to systemic inequalities and obstacles (e.g., lesser education, limited resources to dedicate to the political debate, and the articulation and dissemination of their points of view). In short, which points of view prevail in media arenas does not necessarily depend on the best arguments but often on the arguments more effectively promoted, as judged by advantaged groups in society.

Democratic states have long sought legislation and policies to ensure "the availability, findability, and accessibility of the broadest possible diversity of media content and the representation of the whole diversity of society in the media" (Stasi, 2020, p. 4). Inclusion has been explicitly linked to the communicative power that actors need for success in any democratic political competition. “Indeed, one purpose of regulation must be to promote equal conditions of competition among all sectors of society by guaranteeing special rules that allow access to groups traditionally marginalized from mass communication. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has also endorsed this idea, stating that “freedom of expression requires that the communication media are potentially open to all without discrimination or, more precisely, that there be no individuals or groups that are excluded from access to such media” (Mendel, 2017, p. 18).

For that reason, there is no question that pluralism is necessary for democracy. However, there is no generally agreed definition of it. “Fairness and democratic epistemological presumptions also require that all people can experience inclusion. Good arguments can come from any part of society. Useful challenges usually come from the margins. The inclusionary goal suggests that all groups should have a real

share of media power and no one group or individual should have too inordinate a share of the power. Although the democratic distributive goal may have multiple strands, it must include the notion that members of all groups can experience themselves being served and represented by mass media'" (Baker, 2007, p. 11).

Ideally, according to pluralism theory, citizens can choose from a wide range of ideas (content pluralism), delivered through a wide range of sources (source pluralism), and consumed in a way that provides them with the information they need to exercise their democratic responsibilities (exposure pluralism) (Napoli, 2011, p. 248; Tambini, 2007, p. 27). When a few control information, democratic citizenship is "under threat" or not possible. Therefore, "the democratic goal of inclusiveness is achieved when people experience their views or values or people they identify as having a significant media voice and when they do not find a few owners or groups dominating the media realm" (Baker, 2007, p. 12).

In the theory, source diversity is thought to lead to content diversity – the more media owners, the more viewpoints – and this idea has long kept the focus on media ownership as a proxy for viewpoint diversity at the expense of discussions about actual, present viewpoint diversity in journalistic content. While some research finds statistically significant relationships between ownership and content, other research has questioned the "causal relationship between source diversity and content diversity," and definitive evidence of a systematic relationship does not exist (Napoli, 2011, p. 248).

Furthermore, as Tambini notes, "to guarantee source pluralism is not necessarily to guarantee content pluralism. One reason for this is that it is possible to

include a diversity of viewpoints and exclude others. (A variety of sources may put out similar programme formats and viewpoints, and all may neglect ethnic minorities). Equally, the mere provision of a variety of types and sources of content does not exclude the possibility that the vast majority of a given audience might be exposed to a particular source and type of content" (2011, p. 27-28).

In the case of Latin America, where some argue media ownership is “the most concentrated in the world,” the focus is often on economic factors (ownership and sustainability) and government control (regulation and how much power media groups have with respect to state and political institutions), rather than on actual inclusiveness, which tends to be discussed in passing as if the concentration of media ownership was the only factor that can lead to "a stifling of voices and lack of diversity of coverage” (Podesta, 2016, p. 3-4; Mendel, 2017, p. 19). However, as Fox (2002) states in reviewing the politics of Latin American media during the latter part of the 20th Century, especially in relation to television, "pluralism, however, is not only a function of political debate. It also covers different values, cultures, tastes, and religions" (p. 78). This poses a challenge because values, cultures, tastes, and religions are normally carriers of a culture's exclusionary ideas against certain groups." Even though some scholars in the region have warned that solving concentration of media ownership by itself “would not necessarily lead to more diversity and plurality of voices,” little discussion takes place about how to address and tackle that issue in journalism. There seems to be a kind of cognitive dissonance in the field. Focusing on media ownership as a solution to media pluralism problems

is prioritized while acknowledging that solving ownership concentration issues would not solve pluralism problems.

"Despite their prominence in debates on journalism, the exact meaning of pluralism and diversity as either analytical or normative concepts in media and journalism studies remains contested" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 1). These concepts can be used indistinctly on different levels, "ranging from the structure and ownership of media, through the demographic diversity of the journalistic workforce, to the selection and framing of individual news stories" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 1). Some scholars have called for a "broad and ambitious notion of pluralism that ensures that internally plural and externally plural services are delivered" (Tambini, 2011, p. 27), but this has yet to materialize.

Karppinen and Aelst, and Walgrave, among others, propose analyzing the power distribution aspect of the media. As mentioned, the media serves as an arena where much of the public debate happens, and journalism through its coverage distributes communicative power and reaffirms power relations. Therefore, excluding an actor from it can fundamentally impair or deny their access to participate in the free political power competition upon which the concept of democracy rests, and vice versa (Aelst and Walgrave, 2017).

Journalism and its linkages to the distribution of communicative power in the context of political processes have been acknowledged by political and communication theories using lenses such as the free marketplace of ideas, the public sphere, deliberative democracy, and others with a focus on the range of views, conditions of public debate, and the contestability of public policies as a source of

democratic legitimacy (Karppinen, 2018, p. 5; Girard, 2014, p. 283). Van Aelst and Walgrave are perhaps more explicit in their proposal of a "functional" model as a theoretical approach to media's functions for political actors, which sees the media "as a resource that politicians can use in the struggle over political power with other politicians. For instance, politicians can improve their position in the political process by attaining media access, anticipating media attention, or rhetorically using media coverage. In this way, a functional perspective examines whether and how media affect the balance of power among politicians" (Aelst and Walgrave, 2017, p. 5). Aelst and Walgrave emphasize that the media arena is not a level playing field and is "skewed in favor of actors with formal political power," which matters because research shows that media attention can strengthen an actor's position in a political process (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012; Cook, 2005).

Considering the above, this dissertation seeks to determine if religious sources receive more media attention, that is, communicative power, in the context of a specific political process than other actors directly involved in it, such as those whose human rights are attacked or opposed by religious actors. More specifically, it seeks to determine the extent to which the news coverage applies basic journalistic rules – such as fact-checking – to religious sources or repeats false information provided by them without identifying it as such in comparison to other sources. It also explores how the inclusion and prominence of religious actors in the news stories compared to that of non-religious actors involved in the specific political process under study.

The specific political process chosen for this analysis is the issuing of a technical norm approving a technical norm or protocol to clarify the process and

conditions in which doctors in Costa Rica are allowed to perform an abortion to save a woman's life or health. A Costa Rican law passed in the 1970s permitted abortions in such cases. However, different interpretations of its application resulted in the denial of that right for some patients and legal uncertainty for medical professionals. After a women's rights civil society organization sued the country in the InterAmerican Human Rights Court and a conciliation process took place, the Government agreed to issue this technical norm to clarify the process and the conditions under which "therapeutical abortions" - as they came to be known in the country - could take place. The announcement sparked condemnation from religious groups such as the Catholic Church and evangelical political parties, which launched lobbying and social media campaigns against the technical norm. Opposition to the issue became salient in the 2018 electoral campaign and religious political parties secured about a third of congressional seats, which helped facilitate an agreement between the outgoing and incoming administration to temporarily put the issuing of the technical norm on hold because of "political reasons."

This measure did not stop religious and conservative politicians from continuing to campaign against it, frequently using the spread of disinformation and threats from the new evangelical legislators (plus a few from secular political parties) to block all legislative proposals by the Executive if the measure moved forward at any point. Women's rights groups responded with communication campaigns to put pressure on the new President to sign the decree, which he had promised to do during his electoral campaign. The Government did not engage in campaigns about the matter. Still, it made clarifications as needed - for example, to contradict false

information promoted by opponents of the decree - and made announcements as was needed to keep the public informed about the progress with the technical norm once its approval process was reactivated. This standoff generated extensive news coverage by both legacy and emerging news outlets that continued even after the decree had been signed and the new technical norm had come into effect.

The regional context in which this political process takes place should be noted. In the 2020s, some Latin American countries like Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia have recognized and liberalized women's right to abortion, while Costa Rica's neighboring countries in Central America have followed the opposite path. Religious-led campaigns and political negotiations have eliminated the right to abortion even when needed to save a pregnant woman's life or health. El Salvador, for example, has gone as far as sentencing women who suffered natural abortions to 30-40 years in jail. In Honduras, where abortion is already forbidden, Congress created a constitutional reform that requires a three-quarter majority to pass any future change in the prohibition. In Guatemala, where abortion is also banned, Congress voted to increase jail time to 50 years before the country's President vetoed the bill. In Nicaragua, Ortega's regime negotiated a total prohibition of abortion with the Catholic Church, even in conditions such as ectopic pregnancies that are incompatible with life (the fertilized egg implants outside the uterus, which is always fatal for the fetus and if left untreated also for the woman).

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: *To what extent do fact-based news media repeat false information promoted by elite religious voices without identifying it?*

RQ2: *To what extent do fact-based news media make false information provided by elite religious voices prominent?*

RQ3: *Are religious sources' viewpoints included in news stories to the same extent and similarly prominent positions as women's groups' viewpoints?*

This dissertation also explores differences in the coverage produced by emerging versus legacy news outlets in terms of the extent to which they include elite and non-elite sources and the prominence they assign to each. As discussed above, the debate around pluralism arrives unfinished to the transition from old to digital media systems, which opens an opportunity to – or perhaps makes it unavoidable to – conceptualize notions of pluralism, diversity, and inclusiveness in such a way that they can account for how traditionally silenced groups can continue to be silenced, despite the ubiquity of more accessible communications tools.

"Digital dream" and the "myth of digital democracy" were used by earlier scholars in reference to expectations that the Internet's lowering of ownership barriers, popularization of access to media, and the explosion of diverse content would enable democratic pluralism and allow all voices to express and be heard freely. However, the Internet also brought an abundance of content, aggregators, and

intermediaries that now play the role of “powerful media gatekeepers.” As a result, many citizens continue to obtain information from a few sources and, while it may be easy to speak online, it remains hard to be heard (Hindman, 2009, p. 142). Even the notion that it is "easy" to talk online fails to consider the reality that for traditionally silenced individuals and groups speaking online can be far from easy, as they are often harassed, threatened, and censored for expressing or defending their views (Ananías Soto and Vergara Sánchez, 2019; Reguero, 2018).

"The appearance of freedom in the net can be deceptive: search engines, commercially driven linking, and searching and preferred placement strategies mean that new digital media will provide as many challenges to media pluralism as the old media" (Tambini, 2011, p 33). Furthermore, assessing how digital trends – such as algorithm-recommended content, online harassment, and targeted disinformation campaigns – operate and interact with the cultural causes of the lack of media pluralism remains an open question. "Measuring pluralism in the digital world remains a very challenging task, and the best method for measurement remains to be found. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of reliable and comparative data that would enable the assessment of significant issues for online pluralism in recent years" (Brogui, 2018, p. 79).

The study of pluralism from a media ownership perspective and the challenges of pluralism in the digital era have obscured core questions about a journalistic practice that remain unanswered. "While media policy and regulation are usually concerned with structural questions about media markets and institutions, at the level of journalism practice, there are equally complex questions about what

diverse journalism involves: Should journalism aim to mirror existing social and cultural differences in society as closely as possible? To what extent does journalism also construct these differences? Or should journalism aim for a more radical role of specifically promoting new viewpoints and perspectives that question existing truths and established power structures? And what implications do these questions have for journalists' selection of sources, the framing of issues, and other practical decisions that impact whose voices get access to the public sphere?" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 2).

In sum, media attention or the lack thereof can weaken an actor's position in a political process. Still, there are no generally agreed prescriptions about how journalism should approach the distribution of communicative power beyond journalistic rules like balance and fairness that can be interpreted in many ways, both normatively and in practice. This notwithstanding, the lowering of entry barriers into news markets has led to an injection of emerging digital news outlets across Latin America. If some theorize legacy media as "key conduits for the pursuit of financial and political power, of creating what can be called the 'consensus of the elites' (and) the demobilization of the people and the obliteration of their demands," emerging news outlets are often referred to as "concerned with themes that matter to civil society, something that mainstream commercial media largely concerned with the financial and political elite have neglected" (Castillo, 2018, p. 2). Even though more research is needed about the role of emerging media in the Latin American media systems, some scholars believe "new digitally native non-profit journalism is deeply transforming the way that journalism is conducted in Latin America." Emerging news outlets are also seen as a virtual "Habermasian public sphere" that is "enriching the

region's journalistic ecology" and "helping Latin Americans actively to re-engage with problems neglected by the legacy commercial media" (Castillo, 2018, p. 2-3).

In 2015 in Guatemala, for example, investigations of the then-president's alleged involvement in a corruption scheme by the digital news outlet Nómada played a central role in his detention and prosecution. The outlet also inserted into the public agenda social problems that have long existed in silence, such as unpunished violence against women and girls (Mioli and Nafría, 2018). In Mexico, the native news outlet *Animal Político* flipped mainstream media's tendency to avoid investigating corruption and, in the case of human rights abuses, to "count the dead, reproduce the official version and revictimize the victims" (Mioli and Nafría, 2018, p. 68). Its investigations of corruption schemes and human rights abuses have allowed *Animal Político* to become one of the most influential publications in Mexico as a fact-checking pioneer in the region.

"Digital natives in Latin America have an even more important role to play than their counterparts in the over-saturated media markets of the developed world. News ownership is highly concentrated in these countries. Government advertising is frequently used to reward compliant media outlets. In some cases, they are building sustainable and even profitable businesses" (Sembra Media, 2017, p. 7). Digital natives in Latin America are also adding diversity to newsrooms, "where men dominate traditional media, this finding is even more significant" (Sembra Media, 2017, p. 9). A 2017 study of 100 digital native outlets reported that 62% of the outlets had at least one female founder, and many of the women were part of executive and management teams. (Sembra Media, 2017). In the Costa Rican media system, most of

the digital news outlets that have emerged are for-profit and may have a different vocation than their non-profit counterparts in other countries. Still, for-profit outlets have added diversity in terms of ownership and newsroom leadership, as the emergence of digital outlets has opened ownership and leadership opportunities to more women. However, if more research is needed about non-profit digital journalism, this is even more so in the case of for-profit emerging outlets.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ4: *Do emerging news outlets differ from traditional ones in the extent to which they include elite and non-elite viewpoints and the prominence they assign to each?*

RQ5: *Do female-led news outlets differ from male-led ones in the extent to which they include elite and non-elite viewpoints and the prominence they assign to each?*

Section 4: Method

This study employs quantitative and qualitative content analysis to quantify variables (use of numerical representations), organize the researcher's coding to find patterns, themes, and meaning that explain a given phenomenon (Mertler, 2018), and to draw insights from the "media's symbolic environment" and what it says about society (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 31-32). Neuendorf defines content analysis

as a “message-centered methodology” consistent with summarizing the "quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity-intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing)” (Neuendorf, 2002).

Quantitative content analysis is appropriate for this dissertation because the goal is to identify and describe verified patterns in key variables coded in manifest characteristics of published news coverage, and news consumers’ interpretations of the articles or the impact the coverage may have had on a given political context are not of interest for this analysis. Qualitative analysis is also appropriate because it contributes to combining observation of the text with the specific context in which it occurred in order to produce richer explanations and balance description with interpretation, with the latter being more feasible when working with small enough samples such as the one collected for this dissertation (480 news stories).

To be clear, this analysis is not intended to produce generalizable findings of the news coverage of topics like religion or abortion in general or about the media’s treatment of disinformation more broadly because news organizations, media systems, political contexts, and journalists’ approaches can vary enormously. Instead, using media pluralism theory, it explores whether secular news coverage of religion can serve as a conduit for the spread of disinformation and marginalizing narratives, with theoretical implications on the balance of power relations in a democratic arena. The analysis seeks to investigate whether religious sources can receive more and more favorable secular media attention in the context of a specific political process

than other actors directly involved in it, such as those whose human rights are attacked and/or opposed by religious actors.

The sample analyzed consists of online news stories published by the top three legacy newspapers (*La Nación*, *La República*, and *Diario Extra*) and the top three emerging news outlets in Costa Rica (*CRHoy*, *Delfino*, *El Mundo*). The former three are the country's leading national dailies and some of the oldest newspapers in the local market at the time of this research. The choice of the three emerging outlets was based on web traffic statistics by Alexa.com. This Amazon global traffic tool ranks websites per country according to their average daily unique visitors and pageviews. The country-specific ranking reflects how a given website ranks relative to other websites in the country during the previous month (Alexa, 2020). At the time of sample selection, one of the emerging news outlets was ranked as the third most visited in the country, following Google and YouTube, and had more Facebook followers than any other news site, legacy or emerging.

The period of study starts in May 2018, when the new administration was inaugurated and announced it would temporarily suspend the process of issuing the abortion protocol, and ends in December 2019, when the President issued the technical norm. There were political debates and associated news coverage about the protocol before and after these dates, but the study period was selected because the most decisive points of the process occurred during it. These included legal actions against the protocol, political negotiations, public marches and protests, discussion of related Congressional bills, publication of public opinion polls, and communication campaigns (i.e., documentaries, public statements, religious propaganda, etc.).

The unit of analysis is a news story that meets the following characteristics:

- provides coverage about the protocol and surrounding debate,
- was published online,
- appeared in one of the selected legacy and emerging outlets, and
- was published during the period of study.

A search using the keywords “norma técnica” (which means “technical norm” and is how the protocol is commonly referred to in the country) and “aborto” (which means abortion) was used to collect the sample. The search produced 480 news articles, a sufficiently large sample to conduct statistical analyses. Stories that mentioned the protocol in passing but were focused on other topics were not included. Opinion pieces and stories about similar issues in other countries were also excluded.

Based on the literature reviewed, the coding operationalized the main concepts underlying the research questions, segmenting the concepts into dimensions and indicators. The coding categories are explained in detail in the Method chapter and serve to organize the parameters for the content analysis. The five main coding categories are described below, and the corresponding subcategories are explained in detail in the Method chapter:

- Inclusion/Exclusion: This category refers to the inclusion or exclusion of the three main actors involved in the process (women’s groups, government, and religious groups).

- Voice Type: This category refers to the types of voices whose positions are mentioned or quoted in a given news story, whether they are one of the three main actors mentioned above or others (medical boards, judiciary, etc.).
- Prominence: This category refers to the placement of actors' positions, versions, or actions within a news story, specifically the headline, sub-headline, or lede.
- Outlet Type: This category indicates whether a news story was published on a legacy or emerging news outlet. Each story was also coded according to whether a female or male executive director led the news outlet.
- Disinformation: This category refers to news stories that repeated disinformation provided by sources. Every news story that contained disinformation was coded according to whether the disinformation was identified as such in the story ("Identified") or not ("Unidentified"). The coding also coded the secular or religious nature of the source(s) that provided the disinformation ("Religious" or "Non-Religious"), the placement of the disinformation ("Prominent" or not), and the outlet type ("Legacy" or "Emerging").

For this coding, disinformation is understood as information about the therapeutical abortion protocol that had already been identified as false and misleading by Costa Rican fact-checking or other reputable journalistic publications or that cannot be verified (e.g., "God is against abortion"). This resulted in the

following "units" of disinformation, and a story was considered to repeat disinformation when it included one or more of these:

1. The protocol is unnecessary because it is always possible to save “the two lives.”
2. Women can’t die because of pregnancies.
3. The protocol creates “loopholes” to decriminalize abortion.
4. They conflate therapeutical abortion protocol with decriminalized abortion.
5. Plans are in motion to open abortion clinics.
6. The protocol is unconstitutional and violates the principle of "reserva de ley" (in civil law systems, this principle states that only the legislature can regulate certain matters).
7. Misrepresentation of religious belief as fact (for example, “God says abortion is a crime).”
8. The protocol is a type of execution or death sentence.
9. The majority of the population opposes therapeutical abortion.

Once the dataset was collected and cleaned, a Spanish-speaking coder was trained to apply the codebook. The author of this dissertation and the coder conducted three rounds of coding using a small number of news stories (10 in total between the two) to test the codebook and identify gaps and areas for improvement. Each round generated a few modifications to the codebook, mainly to the subcategories available for coding and the language describing the codes. Suggestions by the dissertation committee's Chair and other members were also incorporated into the codebook.

Once the final version of the codebook was set, about 10% of the sample (50 news stories in total, 25 each coder) was coded to test for intercoder reliability to ensure that minimum standards were met (70% or higher is generally considered an acceptable level of agreement between coders). A Cohen's Kappa analysis was conducted on the responses provided by both coders, and the result of the Kappa Measurement of Agreement showed the coding reached acceptable reliability (k=0.746, p=.000) with k values above .7, which are considered to represent "good agreement" (Pallant, 2016).

Next, the full sample was coded. News stories were listed by date (in chronological order), then divided between the two coders according to each story's I.D. number. Odd-numbered stories were assigned to one coder and even-numbered to the other coder. Given this study's categorical variables and research questions, the Chi-Square test of relatedness or independence was employed to explore relationships between the categorical variables. For descriptive statistics, frequencies were calculated.

Section 5: The Rest of this Dissertation

The rest of this dissertation is organized into eight chapters. The second one, "Latin American Journalism in the Digital Era," provides a characterization of the Latin American media systems, with the clarification that despite some common features, ultimately, each country has a unique context and political and media systems. This chapter also reviews the pluralism and exclusion debates in the region and then focuses on the Costa Rican media system, where the political process and

news coverage analyzed in this dissertation are based, and the emergence of digital news outlets regionally and nationally.

Chapter 3, "Religion, Politics, and Disinformation in Latin America," offers an overview of religious institutions and leaders' relationship with political and media elites from colonial to current times, in the context of “socially structured silences” that have long kept certain groups relegated in the social and political dimensions. This chapter also pays special attention to the reemergence of religious-political ambition across the region - not only from the Catholic Church but also from evangelical churches that created their own political parties to penetrate political and media elites that long eluded them - and explores the role of religious disinformation in that political interplay.

In Chapter 4, "Religion Coverage and Media Pluralism," this dissertation offers an overview of the literature about religion and the news media and the field's common lines of research and debate, as well as a brief review of the historical linkages between religion and the development of journalism as we know it today in the U.S. and its adoption by Latin American journalism cultures. Using a media pluralism framework and its evolution from a focus on diversity to a focus on the political interplay, this chapter also discusses the implications of the news coverage of political processes in democratic systems and how some actors continue to be excluded in political and media arenas.

Chapter 5, "Method," explains the method used to conduct the analyses, which focus has already been briefly described here. As the title suggests, Chapter 6, "Results: Religion Coverage and Disinformation," and Chapter 7, "Results: Pluralism

and Diversity in the Digital Era," discuss the analysis results. The former focuses on the coding results to answer the research questions about the extent to which disinformation provided by religious sources is fact-checked or not before inclusion in the news stories and, when included, how prominent it is. The latter focuses on the research questions about the inclusion and prominence of religious views in news stories compared to those of the women's rights groups involved in the political process observed in this study. It also assesses whether differences are observed when comparing news coverage by emerging and legacy media outlets and female- and male-led newsrooms.

Finally, Chapter 8, "Religion Coverage as a Conduit for Disinformation and Exclusion," discusses the results and reviews this dissertation's findings of how secular news coverage favors religious organizations and leaders, the penetration of religious disinformation into the fact-based news media, and the continuation of exclusionary, non-pluralistic patterns in the news media despite the larger diversity available today in terms of media ownership, source, and exposure.

Chapter 2: Latin American Journalism in the Digital Era

Section 1: Latin American Media Systems

Latin American media systems formed as part of unstable, at times authoritarian democratic systems in small national markets that have long posed obstacles to social inclusion and journalistic independence. At their root, Latin America's media spaces were derived from elite power and were conceived as commodities to be exploited by the private sector and as mechanisms of political and societal control (Lugo, 2008). With few exceptions, the dictatorships and elitist democracies that exchanged power during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were careful to craft the media systems to prevent general access, and guarantee their role as mechanisms of control (Lugo, 2008). Consequently, media freedom was often used as a political tool to promote conservative elitist agendas and sometimes also revolutionary agendas (Salwen and Garrison, 1991). Scholars have characterized this distribution of power as a "collusive relationship" in which media companies consolidated because of political alliances more than because of market or economic reforms. This was the case especially during dictatorships and authoritarian rule that silenced critical media organizations and established close relationships with supportive ones (Márquez and Guerrero, 2017).

"Capture and clientelism are at the core of two contrasting yet overlapping developments observed by experts and scholars in the past two decades in the region: a high degree of media concentration fueled by market-oriented communication policies, and the re-emergence of state intervention," (Márquez and Guerrero, 2017,

p. 43). The resulting symbiotic relationship between authoritarian states and private and commercial media led to a lack of regulation enforcement and the development of mutually beneficial alliances and complicity between media owners and political elites.

These mutually beneficial alliances (between governments and media owners) became the norm in societies characterized by clientelist political systems and small markets in which staying in business required "providing support for an institutionalized hierarchy or oligarchy rather than opening the market to nation building, democratic forces, or the true marketplace of ideas" (Rockwell and Janus, 2003). This norm was particularly the case during dictatorships or authoritarian regimes that would shut down media outlets and detain media owners and workers. This continued in the late 20th century during the leftist populist governments that emerged throughout the region. Even though the “media reforms” appeared to make media systems more pluralistic, they were, in fact, silencing the publication of opposing views (Waisbord, 2011).

In addition, populist governments used legal reforms and legal suits against media corporations. In some cases, this weakened old media elites and lead to a concentration of media in the hands of the state, with subsequent problems of censorship and self-censorship. More than tackling the lack of media pluralism or the capitalist bases of the media market, many media reforms addressed opposing voices. This left the previous market structures in place but with a more politicized press. "The populist disruption produced an important reorganization of the media systems. It strengthened presidential communicative power and weakened the presence of

some private adversaries (….) Beneath the rhetoric of change and revolution, clientelist practices remain" (Waisbord, 2016, p. 28).

The dependence on public funds has long been an elite tool of media control in the region, giving way to the argument that in small markets media concentration was a necessary evil to provide media corporations with economic independence. Such concentration, though, can result in the consolidation of media elites that may be as much of an obstacle to the ultimate objectives of media freedom and a press capable of meeting its democratic duties.

Collusive relationships and media concentration has led some authors, for example, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002), to assume that journalism in Latin America did not sufficiently develop at an institutional level as an independent entity "with a distinctive set of professional values and practices" (p. 8). However, other literature presents a different picture, "one not only of professionalism – by any standard – but also of ethical commitment. Indeed, Latin America is among the regions with the worst record in terms of journalists killed and wounded. Neither is there any evidence that journalism across the region as a whole is practiced any less rigorously than in any other part of the world" (Lugo, 2008, p. 11; Mellado, 2012; Mellado et al., 2017).

The 1980s and 1990s marked a shift toward investigative journalism that contrasted with the region's previous record. This sacrificed "the denunciation of power abuses for economic benefits and political tranquility," "shunned critical reporting and opted for complacent relations with state and market interests," (Waisbord, 2000, p. xiii). This had relegated the watchdog role of the media to

marginal, nonmainstream content during democratic periods and to underground, clandestine ones when dictatorial regimes were in power. However, a shift was possible with the availability of more democratic freedoms in many - but not all - countries, including less censorship and repression, even if in some cases investigative journalism was used more as a marketing strategy.

At the same time, the watchdog role of the press in the region could sometimes be explained as fractures among the elites, resulting in leaks to the news media intended as attacks against inter-elite political enemies. “What initially appears to be competition may reflect only inter-elite battles within an oligarchic system undergoing change. The dream of the media as a democratizing force thus crashes against a larger system” (Rockwell and Janus, 2003).

There is another possible explanation for why the dynamics between excluded groups and the press have differed. The construction of media and deliberative spaces in Latin America is different in its origin than other regions – with different degrees of democratic freedoms, access to economic resources, and religious intromission on state affairs. If contrasted with the United States, for instance, “none of the crucial developments that permitted the rise of a market-oriented press and the ideal of objectivity in the United States existed in the region” during most of its media development (Waisbord, 1996).

In many Latin American countries, dictatorships weakened or destroyed "the classical oppositional movements that might have led social movements, leaving the elites as the only ones able to formulate strategies and the technocrats whose policies 'have normally benefitted the status quo'" (Colin, 2011, p. 30).

In such a context, pluralism in this case amounts to little more than intra-elite pluralism, which is ultimately reflected in the media. This helps to explain why much of the investigative journalism has focused on investigating corruption scandals more than on covering "the egregious social and economic problems of the region" (Colin, 2011, p. 31). Additionally, scandals have more market appeal than the latter stories for the middle- and upper-class consumers that media organizations and advertisers seek to attract.

Aside from the market and regulatory aspects, it is also essential to review the region's journalistic culture. In many Latin American countries, university-level education for journalists started in the context of the Cold War. Perhaps in part because of that, some have described Latin American journalism as ideologized. Teaching journalism was conceived as teaching students to "think" and letting the "the job" show them the rest (Lugo, 2008). Simultaneously, the American professional model of the press was gradually and undoubtedly adopted across the region. The result was a journalistic culture that privileges the aspirations of objectivity and neutrality. This culture articulates the concepts of social justice and media plurality as a core mission but explains them more as functions of class struggles between elites and "the people" than as phenomena underpinned by identity politics and the marginalization of some groups. In the framework of class struggle, "the people" have been more commonly associated with labor unions, farmers groups, the poor, etc. than with socially excluded groups within "the people," such as women, LGBT, natives, blacks, etc. (Sandoval-García, 2008; Cannon, 2016). Being the "voice of the voiceless" has traditionally been exercised through the coverage of the

problems that affect the former (labor unions, farmers groups, the poor, etc.) rather than the latter (women, LGBT, natives, blacks, etc.). This is consistent with a post-colonial social hierarchy deeply rooted in a region in which women, natives, LGBT, blacks, etc. are at the bottom of the totem pole, while “white male elites” dominated political and economic power plus academia and the media (Ferreira, 2006).

In other words, equally important within those "collusive" alliances between conservative and media elites are what Ferreira calls the "socially structured silences" inherited from the post-colonial rule. These silences resulted, on the one hand, from the Crown and the Catholic Church’s brutal repression and "exclusive monopolies over public channels for the distribution of knowledge," and on the other, from the systematic degradation of natives, women, and (eventually imported) African slaves, which has remained deeply rooted in the Latin American culture and social order (Ferreira, 2006). "From Europe, Latin America inherited a structural colonial censorship built on at least four pillars: racism, official intimidation, technological elitism, and ideological intolerance." The censorship was also built on a social hierarchy that regarded women as "intellectually inferior, prone to error and evil," destined to "keep silent" and written out of the history books (Ferreira, 2006, p. 42).

The "socially structured silences" described above were – and continue to be - reflected in the Latin American press. Journalism has been theorized as a service to the public interest, a core part of the democratic checks and balances, and a voice for those "without" a voice, transcending the interests of particular political parties, media owners, and social groups. However, the news media represent a complex interplay of economic, political, and social forces. Journalists are also active parts of

their cultures and social norms, they "fear social opprobrium and internalize the assumptions of their culture," and are, in essence, "products of their times" (Perloff, 2000, p. 327). Previous literature has shown that even in contexts of democratic, independent journalism, the news media can still fail to fulfill its mission with regard to those groups. Instead, the media silence, demonize, and even symbolically annihilate certain groups perpetuating exclusion and abuse (Tuchman, 2000; Perloff, 2000).

"Media critics, historians and communications researchers offer evidence to support what William Lloyd Garrison said about the press and the Abolitionists, what Susan B. Anthony said about the press and the suffragists, and what Upton Sinclair said about the press and the Socialists. All three claimed that non-institutionalized groups whose ideas and goals challenge prevailing societal and political beliefs are often denied access to the press (...) If the reader is to get a representative picture of society, the newspaper must open its pages to the activities and ideas of a variety of groups within the society" (Kessler, 1980, p. 598). On the upside, other literature demonstrates how the news media can play a catalytic role in "giving" a voice to silenced and or abused groups, legitimizing the groups' claims and demanding accountability in the face of abuse of power. Such a role can prompt and pave the way for social change.

In Latin America, the understanding of who is a citizen has also evolved. "The making of cultural identity in the Latin American nations has involved a process of reversing the negation of the indigenous, the mestizo, the peasant, the marginal, and, of course, women. A new cultural understanding of what citizenship means has

emerged in the new democracies of the 1990s and, in particular, in the new social movements organized by women, the landless and the urban marginal, among others" (Jones and Munck, 2000, p. 191). The extent to which that new democratic citizenship is reflected in the media and how it is represented – or ignored – is still an open question. This issue has long been discussed in as media pluralism and/or inclusiveness.

The debate about media pluralism - or the lack thereof - has been a constant during the last decades among political science, communication, and journalism scholars in the region. A detailed review of the theoretical notions associated with the conceptualization of media pluralism will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The following section reviews the literature about the status of media pluralism in Latin America to present a more complete picture of media systems in the region.

Section 2: Media Pluralism and Media Exclusion

Much of the debate about media pluralism has focused on the concentration of media ownership, and Latin America has not been an exception. Some scholars believe the "concentration of media ownership leads to a stifling of voices and lack of diversity of coverage" (Podesta, 2016, p. 3-4). More diversity of owners could come with more diversity of content, which is assumed to produce pluralistic media capable of serving as the genuine competitive marketplace of ideas that democracies are meant to rely on for citizens to participate (Fox, 2002; Mendel, 2017). In Latin America, where some argue media ownership is the most concentrated in the world,

the focus has been on economic factors and government regulation determining the power of media groups rather than on whether they are producing the expected pluralism improvements.

For instance, Mendel articulates pluralism as a function of ownership. "If these media are controlled by a reduced number of individuals, or by only one individual, this situation would create a society in which a reduced number of individuals, or just one, would exert control over the information and, directly or indirectly, on the opinion received by the rest of the people. This lack of plurality in sources of information is a serious obstacle for the functioning of democracy" (Mendel, 2017, p. 11). Mastrini and Becerra understand the lack of media pluralism as the structural exclusion from access to media goods and services, rather than being excluded from coverage by diverse media in a given political context. Mauersberger approaches the lack of pluralism as a market failure. "Media markets are prone to market failures (particularly the formation of monopolies), but more fundamentally, commercial media evidence structural limitations regarding the democratic representation of a plurality of voices. When content is determined by an advertiser-mediated supply and demand chain, it becomes distorted by the purchasing power of the target audience. This effect is particularly visible in economically highly unequal societies and is not becoming obsolete through technological developments. So although direct censorship exerted by governments is easily visible for the observer, less visible market-driven mechanisms can equally limit the access to the public sphere" (Mauersberger, 2015, p. 45).

Guerrero assesses pluralism after the arrival of the Internet also in terms of ownership and sees it as a sign of changes in ownership of community media and broader access to communication technologies "free from (formal) regulatory restrictions" (Guerrero, 2015, p. 11). However, these factors are not necessarily indicators of the extent to which the voices of marginalized groups have entered the media spaces where influential political debate continues to take place.

Referring to Central American media systems, Rockwell and Janus go as far as to attribute democratic stagnation to media concentration. “The media reflect the rulers or the media oligarchy speaking to the ruled (the classes below the top echelons of political and economic elites) rather than the free exchange of ideas between disparate classes and forces necessary in a democracy. Media monopolies have tended to impede the freedoms necessary for long-term sustainable democracies” (2003, p. 10). Other scholars have associated the lack of media plurality in the developing world with global, imperialistic factors. “Starting in the 1960s and continuing through the late 1970s, media scholars and other experts in the region denounced the unequal access to information in the developing world. They were concerned about media concentration and unregulated, market-driven policies that, they maintained, undermined local production, voices, and creativity due to dependence on U.S. content, formats, and technologies, as well as information supplied by Western-based news agencies” (Márquez and Guerrero, 2017, p. 52).

As can be seen, discussions in the region often seem to equate breaking media concentration and/or the availability of public media with media pluralism (Mastrini and Becerra, 2006; Mendel, 2017; Podesta, 2016). Similarly, pluralism is often

understood as a catalyst to bridge media inequalities between the rich and the poor, as if class was the only source of inequality and not a function of citizens' place in the social hierarchy. Why certain groups are not covered fairly or covered at all is often attributed to censorship, business interests, or a lack of professionalization, but cultural factors and journalistic autonomy can also determine whose voices and experiences are deemed worthy of coverage in the news. How the voices are covered, and which voices feel safe speaking publicly without facing social repudiation or other forms of retribution is a dimension that many scholars have overlooked or acknowledged (Sandoval-García, 2008; Perloff, 2000).

This is not to suggest that ownership does not matter, but rather that it is not the only determinant factor. Discussing media transitions in Latin America, Sparks says that less concentration and more independently owned media has sometimes allowed the press to play an important role in broadening the range of the political debate. Colin also notes that "a more inclusive account, however, would be forced to question whether these two processes (democratization and marketization) are inevitably linked in such a way" (2011, p. 32).

Reviewing the politics of Latin American media during the latter part of the 20th Century, especially in relation to television, Fox (2002) states that "pluralism, however, is not only a function of political debate. It also covers different values, cultures, tastes, and religions" (p. 78). This poses an important challenge because values, cultures, tastes, and religions are normally carriers of a culture's exclusionary ideas against certain groups. In Latin America, this challenge could manifest itself as media institutions and audiences that consider, for example, content about

homosexuality as not "family appropriate" or news covering pro-abortion activism as not of "public interest." "The new respect for different cultural values also generates inevitable tensions and discrepancies in newly pluralist societies. As cultural diversity increases, so too do the demands that different social actors place" on media (Fox, 2002, p. 83), making media pluralism a phenomenon that cannot be understood from a strictly economic or legalistic approach to media systems.

Although research from other regions suggests there may be a statistically significant relationship between ownership and content, the "causal relationship between source diversity and content diversity has, at various times, been questioned, and research addressing this relationship has not provided definitive evidence of a systematic relationship" (Napoli, 2011, p. 248).

Similarly, the tacit presumption that viewpoint diversity and media inclusion are equivalent doesn't hold. That is because one could argue that it is possible to include diverse viewpoints while still systematically excluding others. Tambini (2011) notes, "to guarantee source pluralism is not necessarily to guarantee content pluralism," as "a variety of sources may put out similar programme formats and viewpoints, and all may neglect ethnic minorities" (p. 27-28). Furthermore, diversity of media owners does not necessarily lead to or guarantee diversity of exposure, especially with today's Internet and social media. There can be more media owner diversity, but that does not guarantee that the general electorate will be exposed to a diversity in voices and ideas unless the media that reach larger audiences cover those voices and the news algorithms and aggregators use diversity policies for the promotion and distribution of content. "In this partial view of the political

environment, the audience is exposed to the views of the few" (Lavasseur, 2008, p. 438).

Such a mix of political, economic, and cultural factors helps explain why the media mirrors the marginalization of certain groups in Latin American media. The region's democratization process has been characterized by what Calderón calls "new types of conflicts," in reference to demands for labor rights, quality of life and public services in urban areas, land tenure in indigenous zones, the human rights of women, and other areas. Concerning the latter, for instance, women-led movements emphasized the role of women in production and accelerated the political redefinition of public and private spheres. The movements were an active part of many of the other social conflicts mentioned, but "the media give only limited recognition to the tensions of gender issues" (Calderón, 2013, p. 18). Gender tensions in the region are seen as part of a "cultural conflict" that became politicized rather than a legitimately political conflict about the balance of political power between genders in society. This distinction can mark the difference between whether a topic, group, or individual is worthy of news coverage, and what frames are used in their coverage.

News about cultural conflicts has traditionally been considered less important than political and economic news in the journalistic priorities of Latin American media – and arguably of media elsewhere. Such labeling or categorization of issues has served the interest of the region's conservative elites such as large media owners, who have "rarely used established political parties as main focus of power strategies and preferred to use their dominance of ideological, economic, military and international power networks to maintain their hegemony" (Cannon, 2016, p. 3).

Cannon analyzed the reaction of the Latin American right to advance progressive agendas in the first decades of the 21st Century and proposes using theories on social power that can account for inequality not just in terms of class but also in terms of gender, ethnicity, and other intersecting inequalities. This dissertation seeks to collect new empirical evidence to show that understanding news pluralism requires a multidimensional approach extending beyond solely rigidly defined economic and political factors. This dissertation also explores the social and cultural dimensions that have served as sources of power and how they affect which voices are covered or ignored by the media, as looking at the concept of pluralism in a detailed way requires considering national and, in some cases, subnational contexts. This discussion refers to Latin America as a geographical unit because the focus is on broader trends across the region. Still, the situation from country to country is far from homogeneous and an accurate analysis may require consideration of local specificities (Fox, 2002; Waisbord, 2011; Salwen, 1991). As Lugo posits, "despite the process of globalization, national contexts still provide crucial explanatory frameworks for national media systems throughout Latin America," (Lugo, 2008, p. 2).

Section 3: The Costa Rican Media System

The case analyzed in this dissertation is located in Costa Rica, a country with a media system that has historically been characterized as concentrated on a small number of owners. "In Costa Rica, as in much of Latin America, the large mainstream media are often comprised of members from conservative families espousing

traditional, conservative views" (Salwen and Garrison, 1991, p. 4).

The main media institutions formed during the country's modernization processes during the mid-20th century. The modernization included an armed political conflict that resulted in the abolition of the army plus the consolidation of a democratic system, massive urban expansion, and the construction of a social welfare state including universal healthcare, free public education, state-owned water, electricity, telecommunications services, etc. The expansion of public services for print and T.V. media in Costa Rica since this period has also advocated for conservative perspectives. "This is a major paradox of Costa Rican society, in that while key institutions have made possible the access of vast majorities to key services, media and other institutions related to the cultural sector have been left behind. The weakness of cultural policies has diminished the possibility of having a wider public sphere voicing opposition to projects that have debilitated welfare institutions in recent decades" (Sandoval 2008, p. 103).

Much of the political debate in the country today reveals the tension between those who support public expenditure on welfare institutions and those who promote liberal policies. "In this context, the various media are crucial institutions, both in terms of the ways in which they are organized and from the point of view of the ideologies they promote" (Sandoval, 2008, p. 104). And as Salwen and Garrison note, "in theory, this should not be a problem if the 'marketplace of ideas' is large enough to permit a wide array of opinions to be disseminated. However, in practice, financial constraints in small nations such as Costa Rica often limit the size of the mass media marketplace" (2015, p. 4).

Oligopolies have been common in Costa Rican media. For example, the most popular newspaper, *La Nación*, also owns several smaller newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, and is one of the most visited websites in the country. Competing for circulation with *La Nación* is *The Extra Group*, which owns sensationalist newspaper *Diario Extra*, a T.V. station, a radio station, and, at some point, had bought a legacy newspaper that has since closed its doors. In television, *Televisora de Costa Rica* owns *Channel 7*, the first T.V. station in the country and the highest in audience ratings today. It also owns a radio station and one of the top cable providers. The only competition for *Televisora de Costa Rica* is *Repretel*, which is owned by a Mexican media group and controls several TV channels.

La Nación and *Channel 7* receive most of the commercial advertising. Although this means the media outlets have journalistic independence from government funding, their dominance in the market for a long time made diverse media ownership less likely in the country.

Coverage by three legacy media outlets is analyzed in this dissertation. The first one is the daily *La Nación*, which, as mentioned above, has traditionally been considered the most influential in the country. With Internet-driven changes in the media market over the last two decades, the newspaper went behind a paywall, which created room for emerging digital outlets to attract news consumers unwilling to pay for news content. The newspaper is majority-owned by a family and the director during the period of study was a male journalist. The second news outlet in the sample is the newspaper *Diario Extra*, which as mentioned is one of the most important in terms of newsstand distribution across the country. Even though it is a

sensationalist news outlet, it covers politics and reaches an important portion of news consumers in the lower socioeconomic tiers. The newspaper is partly owned and managed by a woman and was directed by another during the period of study (Alfaro, 2021; *Diario Extra*, 2014), though the latter resigned in 2021 due to editorial disagreements with the owner and manager, according to media reports. The third legacy news outlet included in the sample is *La República*, a newspaper that for many years was a competitor for *La Nación*, if not economically certainly in terms of editorial content and perhaps political influence. However, in the early 2000s, it switched to a business coverage focus, though it still covers politics and reaches higher socioeconomic tiers. The newspaper is male-owned and directed. The emerging news outlets included in the sample are discussed later in this chapter.

Costa Rica has, for many decades, been known in the region for its stable democracy, leading socioeconomic indicators (including high literacy rates and far-reaching access to electricity and, more recently, the Internet), and respect for freedom of expression and the press. However, governments can still pressure and harass media organizations when they disagree with certain news content using both legal and economic means.

Costa Rica is one of few countries in the world where defamation remains a criminal offense and can land a journalist in jail (though no such cases have occurred in decades), and media corporations may face severe economic punishment that can put them out of business. "Our freedom of expression is limited by laws. The great difference between Costa Rica and other countries is that all of this happens in the legislative and judicial arenas. According to Eduardo Ulibarri, a former long-time

director of *La Nación*, ‘If you interpreted all this legislative avalanche in its most restrictive sense, you could paralyze Costa Rica's media’ (Rockwell and Janus, 2003, p. 162). Even though media laws are not typically applied in their most restrictive sense in Costa Rica, most experts generally consider the laws to have a chilling effect.

Government threats to pull advertisements from the biggest media corporations are also documented from time to time. For example, in 2016, the Supreme Court ruled against a state-owned bank for withholding advertising from newspaper *La Nación* in retribution for coverage the bank did not like. The judges considered the bank exercised "indirect censorship" by using public funds to try to influence the news media in "antidemocratic" ways and ordered it to refrain from such actions in the future (Oviedo y Cambronero, 2016). A 2008 international report about indirect censorship in the region found that in 2004 the Executive decreased public advertising with newspaper *La Nación* in retribution for news coverage then-President Abel Pacheco did not like and as an attempt to leverage advertising to pursue a more favorable coverage of an issue that was going to a national referendum at the time (Umaña, 2008). In these cases, the newspaper held its ground.

Beyond economic and legal factors, it is also important to consider the symbolic power of legacy media in Costa Rica. For instance, some authors attribute to *La Nación* the ability to "translating its symbolic power into the agenda of the public sphere, influencing the political class, the rest of the media and the general public" and speaking for the nation "through what Robert Stam termed 'the regime of the fictive we.' The 'we', especially in editorials, is a sort of inclusive actor, able to choose the best political decision for the future of the country. ‘National interest’ is

naturalized as a prerogative of *La Nación*" (Sandoval, 2008, p. 108).

Costa Rican television continues to be the most popular media in the country, as many people do not read newspapers. Interestingly, much of TV news focuses on crime and entertainment while one of the newspapers with the largest circulation is dedicated to sensational stories (Marchena, 2021). Furthermore, legacy news media in Costa Rica offer only limited space for readers' opinions, meaning inclusive debates have not widened with the emergence of more newspapers and television channels. The result of all this is a thin public sphere.

With the internet allowing readers' comments and discussions on mainstream media's websites and social media, one could argue that readers have more opportunities to express their views. Still, the extent to which online comments in Costa Rican media can be considered spaces commensurate with inclusion in the op-ed and news spaces remains unknown. Costa Ricans are used to discussing politics informally, such as at home or among friends. Formalized venues such as the media have been scarce, especially for the majority of the population with lower education levels and in rural areas. "Formal education, gender and place of residence make an important difference in terms of access. Thus, those with higher education, especially men living in urban areas, have more probability of being connected (…) Politics and the media are still a male arena and this tendency increases among those with less literacy" (Sandoval, 2008, p. 108).

At the same time, it is not yet known whether the trends in the second decade of the 21st Century of higher participation of women in politics and newsrooms and broader access to online media among youth, rural populations and those with less

education have changed – if at all. In particular, there is an open question about whether new technologies and associated news media practices have resulted in transformative changes of what some authors refer to as “the problems neglected by the legacy commercial media” (Castilho, 2018, p. 3) or whether these problems continue to be neglected.

Section 4: The Arrival of Digital Media

Despite advances in democratic freedoms and some in the development of public media, an impoverished public sphere and the dominance of elite-controlled mainstream media agendas continue to characterize Costa Rican media systems. However, the arrival of the Internet has emerged as an opportunity for everybody – including traditionally marginalized groups – to find new ways of entering the public sphere and finding more ways to participate.

As Sierra and Gavante note, "citizen participation in Latin America through social media is the result of a long and continued process of social appropriation of new technologies that have characterized the conflictive and contradictory struggles for democracy in the region, given the lack of representation channels and public visibility prevailing in a privative system and at times the monopoly of legacy media" (2014, p. 2).

While legacy media continue to have the loudest voices in the marketplace of ideas, digital natives have leveraged new technologies to challenge the media's agenda-setting power and the elites' construction of hegemonic notions about democracy. This has turned the Internet into a political battleground with profound

changes in the emergence of new points of view, the construction of collective identities, and the types of political interventions observable (Sierra and Gavante, 2014; Castillo, 2018).

One of the most notorious changes can be seen in the deliberation of political ideas among citizens, which was previously possible only in private spaces like homes, offices, schools, or bars rather than public forums. Furthermore, citizens now have more autonomy over discussions and topics they want to discuss, leading some scholars in the region to discuss a "new citizenship." As Sierra and Gavante note, "New generations and women and subaltern groups have developed in Latin America with new forms of public articulation and participation as actors (…). The digital revolution points to a new logic of interaction that, in turn, demands new policies at the institutional level" (2014, p. 2).

Historically, the incursions of relegated groups into the "public" spaces reserved for the privileged were typically met with a backlash, and digital media has served that purpose. In Latin America, as in much of the democratic world, social media has enabled a wave of hate speech and communications targeting many "trespassing" groups. The objectives are usually protecting the status quo by discouraging the groups from participating in political debates, framing their messages in ways that disqualify their views, and/or drowning their voices by creating noise around certain topics. Such strategies matter because, in the same way that online discussions by traditionally excluded groups can permeate mainstream media agendas and political actors' positions on a range of topics, narratives against those groups can do so as well.

Online hate speech can also impact the existence, advancement, and exercise of human and political rights. For example, a Brazilian gay congressman had to resign and leave the country due to imminent danger to his life and several pro-abortion activists were stabbed during a peaceful march in Chile (Hernández, 2019; Montes, 2018). Homicides against human rights defenders, social minorities, and women rate well above global averages (Piccone, 2019).

Torres and Taricco (2019) suggest analyzing hate speech as a social discourse because its normalization in the public sphere is arguably linked to its capacity to generate an environment of intolerance and incentivize discrimination and violence. Angenot (2004) defines social discourse as "everything that is said or written in a given state of society, everything that is printed or talked about and represented today through electronic media (…) not approached as an empirical 'everything,' but rather as a constructed object, that is, the extrapolation of those discursive rules and topics that underlie (…) the basic components of what engenders the sayable, the writable, institutionalized discourses of all kinds, the discursive acceptability at a given historical moment in a given society" (p. 200).

The popularization of extreme narratives (organic and non-organic) in social media of declining satisfaction and trust in democratic institutions - including the media and its inability to meet citizens' demands - contributed to a new political environment of populists from the right and the left to win elections with divisive demagoguery and promises of returning to the exclusionary but familiar distribution of power of the past.

"Latin America has entered a new stage in its wobbly consolidation of liberal democracy. A slew of important presidential elections in 2018 demonstrated that the basic mechanics of representative democracy and competitive politics are functioning. At the same time, older problems related to questionable campaign finance and newer problems generated by social media put stress on political systems burdened by high levels of inequality, corruption and crime, and weak rule of law (…) The usual tools that many elites use to shape democratization to their advantage, including political finance, patronage, and media ownership, are losing their power. No clear substitute is emerging to rebalance the system, opening the door to populists and neo- authoritarians" (Piccone, 2019, p. 2).

The description above represents the situation across the region. How it is playing out varies from country to country. It often depends on how solid the democratic institutions are, alphabetization levels, citizen access to the Internet, the extent of country-specific problems (e.g., guerillas in Colombia, powerful drug cartels in Mexico, racism against indigenous populations in Bolivia, etc.), and the reconfiguration of media markets within a country.

Many legacy news organizations have invested in tools to engage readers via websites and social media. Simultaneously, new online-only news outlets have emerged in most, if not all, Latin American countries. Some theorize the legacy media as "key conduits for the pursuit of financial and political power, of creating what can be called the 'consensus of the elites' (and) the demobilization of the people and the obliteration of their demands," and new online-only news outlets as "concerned with themes that matter to civil society, something that mainstream

commercial media – largely concerned with the financial and political elite have neglected" (Castillo, 2018, p. 2). While new online-only news outlets are relatively new and more research is needed about their role in the Latin American media systems, some scholars believe "this new digitally native non-profit journalism is deeply transforming the way that journalism is conducted in Latin America." Emerging news outlets are also seen as a virtual "Habermasian public sphere" that is "enriching the region's journalistic ecology" and "helping Latin Americans actively to re-engage with problems neglected by the legacy commercial media" (Castillo, 2018, p. 2-3).

In 2015 in Guatemala, for example, investigations of the then-president's alleged involvement in a corruption scheme by the digital news outlet Nómada played a central role in his detention and prosecution. The outlet also inserted into the public agenda social problems that have long existed in silence, such as unpunished violence against women and girls (Mioli and Nafría, 2018).

In Mexico, the native news outlet *Animal Político* helped flip mainstream media's tendency to avoid investigating corruption and, in the case of human rights abuses, to "count the dead, reproduce the official version and revictimize the victims" (Mioli and Nafría, 2018, p. 68). Its investigations of corruption schemes and human rights abuses have allowed *Animal Político* to become one of the most influential publications in Mexico as a fact-checking pioneer in the region.

According to a report by Sembra Media, “Digital natives in Latin America have an even more important role to play than their counterparts in the over-saturated media markets of the developed world. News ownership is highly concentrated in

these countries, and government advertising is frequently used to reward compliant media outlets, and, in some cases, they are building sustainable and even profitable businesses" (2017, p. 7). Digital natives in Latin America are also adding diversity to newsrooms, "where traditional media is dominated by men, this finding is even more significant" (Sembra Media, 2017, p. 9). A 2017 study of 100 digital native outlets reported that 62% of the outlets had at least one female founder, and many of the women were part of executive and management teams (Sembra Media, 2017).

Not all native news outlets in the region are non-profit organizations, however. For instance, most if not all news websites in Costa Rica are owned by private investors from both elite and nonelite circles. In at least one case, the owners of an outlet have refused to be identified (Castillo Nieto, 2019). Other owners are part of corporate groups that include both news outlets and political consulting services (communications, opinion polls, etc.), which has created undesirable ethical situations (Prado, 2018). Only one of the emerging news outlets aims for readers' paid subscriptions while still making part of its content free and incentivizes citizen participation as one of its main objectives (*Delfino*, 2020).

For this dissertation, the first emerging news outlet chosen for the sample is *CRHoy*, which has the most traffic of any news website in the country and was the first outlet created for digital (even though legacy media had websites, during their first years they would place online content originally prepared for print or TV). It started in 2011 and covers a wide range of news, including politics. The owner is a banker who is also a member of the editorial committee, though the outlet claims he "does not interfere in daily editorial decisions" (Estarque, 2021). The newsroom was

directed by a female journalist during the period of study. The second outlet included in the sample is *Delfino*, which started as an email news list and in 2018 launched as a news website. It is the only emerging outlet that charges a membership (US$56 per year) for access to some of its content, but it offers part of its content for free. It defines itself as focused on interpretative journalism and focuses its resources on in-depth coverage of only some news topics, which complements with the use of curated material from other outlets and sources (national and international) to offer an overview of daily news it does not cover by itself (*Delfino*, 2020; *Delfino*, N.D.). The main owner and director is a young male journalist who after experience in mainstream media and some entrepreneurial attempts caught the interest of a business accelerator (*Delfino*, N.D.). The third emerging news outlet in the sample is *El Mundo*, which started in 2015 with a focus on political coverage. Its news stories tend to be short (sometimes 2-3 paragraphs) and often based on one version only, with little or no context added by the reporter about the topics covered. It is partly owned and directed by a female journalist and is part of a group of small corporations that also offer political consulting services such as communications, opinion polls, etc. to some of the political parties the news outlet covers. This has justly generated criticism for conservative bias and integrity issues (López González, 2020).

More women are present nowadays in both ownership structures and editorial boards. Several newsrooms are led by female editors-in-chief and at least three (one legacy and two emerging) are also partially owned by women, contributing to an overall more diverse media landscape. Some scholars interpret diversity changes as a sign that the Internet in Latin America has "repositioned alternative media as a place

of resistance to power and of experimenting with new forms of communication" (Castilho, 2018). However, while that can be the case in some instances, in others it may depend on the media outlet and even on the topic and actors covered, as we will see in this dissertation.

Given the assumption that less media ownership concentration and more diversity in management lead to the inclusion of more voices in the news – particularly from traditionally marginalized groups – more research is needed to determine the extent to which in the digital environment elite groups continue to be amplified while traditionally excluded nonelite groups continue to be minimized by the news media. This dissertation responds by conducting a content analysis of the coverage of a specific issue by digital legacy and emerging news outlets in a Latin American country.

The issue is the process to issue a technical norm or protocol to operationalize in Costa Rica the right to abortion to protect patients' health and lives. In parallel with the inclusion or exclusion of nonelite voices in news stories, prominence bias might also be at play when the views of some actors are overly emphasized and others minimized. This includes voices being highlighted in headlines and leads paragraphs while other voices are minimized by appearing only near the end of a story. This bias in prominent placement occurs when the focus on well-known politicians produces a self-reinforcing cycle of focusing only on prominent politicians. Covering only the voices of well-known politicians, clergy and other elite actors provides news consumers with a partial picture of politics. “In this partial view of the political environment, the audience is exposed to the views of the few" (Lavasseur, 2008, p.

438). Prominence bias has often been studied in the context of electoral campaigns to assess the extent to which the media may favor well-known politicians over those less well-known. It is also applicable in the context of other politically contentious issues, which are often part of campaign agendas.

Chapter 3: Religion, Politics, and Disinformation in Latin America

Section 1: Religion in Latin American Politics

The "socially structured silences" ingrained in Latin American societies discussed in Chapter 2 have their roots in the rule by the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church during the colonization of much of the American continent. The Spanish kings actively sought to develop the Church because their claim to the colonies was partly based on a Christianizing mission and operated under a "royal patronage" system agreed with the Vatican, which allowed them to appoint and control top church authorities such as bishops and archbishops. This combination of political and religious power allowed the Catholic Church to become wealthier and more powerful. "Jurisdictions shifted as local bishops came to regulate idolatry and heresy among the native population while the Inquisition focused more on larger political and social issues. In the end, the Spanish Crown recognized that the Church was a very powerful institution and sought to control many of its activities" (Schwaller, 2016).

The Church also controlled what media existed. Darling (2013) found in a review of regulations for press, pamphlets and newspapers published in the capitals of Peru and Mexico, which were the two most important colonial cities, demonstrate that "media was part of a complex system of interdependence that kept the church and the crown in power for three centuries" (p. 103). "Even during a short period of press freedom, religious publications remained subject to prior restraint. Editors not only

accepted those restrictions but also defended them in print, indicating that they were part of a system that maintained the power base of colonial society" (Darling, 2013, p. 103).

Spanish rule ended between 1808 and 1826 (depending on each country's independence date) but the Catholic Church remained a strong actor, by then deeply integrated into the local societies. An important part of the clergy consisted of creole priests, some of whom resented the privileges granted to Spanish-born priests and supported – in a few cases even helped lead – the revolutions that ultimately brought independence to the Latin American countries. The first actions of many of the new democracies included equality for all males, abolition of black slavery, Catholicism as the only religion permitted, and in some cases the election of clergy to public positions (Klaiber, 2016).

Thus, in the early transition from colony to independent countries, support from the clergy was important for many secular leaders and set the precedent of vast religious intervention in political affairs as a regular occurrence in the following centuries. When political independence was achieved, however, the Church lost the power it had long held to forbid the publication and distribution of progressive books and ideas. Still, it retained control of religious education in schools and the ability to influence most of the population from the pulpit, which gave it a strategic platform from which to counter the emergence of non-religious thought.

The separation of state and church occurred gradually across the region over the following decades as conservative and liberal politicians battled and citizens were eventually free to choose their religion or not have any. However, with a population

still mostly Catholic, the Church continued to exercise major influence. Contrary to the Church's official stance of political "neutrality," in practice priests did not shy away from using the pulpit to tell churchgoers how to vote and leverage that influence to affect government decision-making, especially as the consolidation of democratic institutions pushed by liberal elites started limiting the Church's margin of action (Solano, 2011).

The interplay between the clergy and the political elites evolved differently in each country. In the case of Costa Rica, reforms known as the "liberal laws" passed between 1884 and 1889 deepened the separation between the state and the church. The new laws took away Church privileges such as teaching Catholicism in publicly funded schools, introduced civil marriage, and legalized divorce. The change redefined the sphere of influence allowed to the Church, something the clergy sought to reverse in the decades that followed by jumping into the electoral arena (Vargas, 1989).

During the 1889 electoral campaign, some priests would not only preach in the pulpit in favor of one political candidate or another but also in markets and other public spaces, in exchange for reassurances that the new administration would reinstate Catholic education in the public school system. The clergy then launched their own political party (Partido Unión Católica), and a successful run in the 1891 municipal elections emboldened them to intensify their demands to reinstate Catholic education, which was echoed by Catholic newspapers that pushed the message that "the only actor capable of performing the education function in society is the Church" (Solano, 2011). A year later, the government acquiesced but the clergy's political

party remained active and went on to win the first round of the 1894 elections by a wide margin, leading to violent confrontations the Church lost and led to the dissolution of the Catholic political party. Congress eventually passed a constitutional prohibition against religious participation and religious propaganda in elections, and, again, ended religious education in the public system.

The clergy continued to perceive government institutions as tools to advance their "pastoral mission" though, and constantly sought alliances with ruling elites. In that sense, the Church was fully considered part of the political class (González, 1988). The Church understood its margin of action was now more limited and worked to create the impression of a "co-conduction" of the country by state and Church (for example, by organizing religious festivities around major political events and inviting top politicians to be present) (Sánchez, 2014). The Church also supported the proliferation of Catholic media (originally started in the 1880s) and Catholic citizen associations. Furthermore, as Communism and workers' movements gained some political prominence throughout the 20th Century, the Church aligned with the political right in exchange for finally regaining control of religious education in public schools. While the clergy in some Latin American countries embraced liberation theology's concerns for the poor and the political liberation of the oppressed, the Costa Rican Church maintained an "anti-communist profile, approved the existing order without criticism, [and] referred to syndicalism as 'class hate'" (Molina and Palmer, 2005, p. 23).

Such ideas were ingrained in Church-controlled religious education. As historian Ivan Molina explains, religious education "made cultural and religious

diversity invisible, and contributed to the creation of the imaginary of a Costa Rica with no social tension in which we are all 'the same,' descendants of humble laborers. It contributed to the formation of workers who were docile, disciplined and respectful of authorities. By being at the service of a unique religious tradition, [religious education] reaffirmed the monocultural and ethnocentric character of the Costa Rican education" (Méndez, 2017, p. 162). In 2010, the Constitutional Court ruled that the final decision on hiring religious education teachers corresponds to the Ministry of Education and not to the Catholic Church. It also said religion classes should also be available for individuals of other religions, and that the study of religion should be approached from a broader perspective. However, by 2022, the Church continued to control religious education because no government has attempted to implement the changes emanating from the Supreme Court's decision (Murillo, 2019). Furthermore, the 2022 winning presidential candidate agreed during his electoral campaign to place individuals recommended by evangelical pastors in key positions in the ministries of Education, Health, and Foreign Affairs.

As of 2020, Costa Rica remains the only confessional country in Latin America. Even though there is complete separation between the state and the Church, the Constitution states Catholicism is the religion of the state and mandates the use of public funds to help maintain it. No other consequences emanate directly from that provision (beyond a symbolic legitimization of Catholicism over other religions) and several reform attempts have failed.

The expansion of other religions has followed a different path, but they too have focused on fighting for political power. During colonial times, the Spanish

conquerors and the Church not only installed Inquisition tribunals throughout the colonies and violently suppressed natives' non-Catholic beliefs and rituals, but also isolated them from contact with non-Catholic foreigners who could expose them to other religions. For example, trade was forbidden even among colonies to lower the risk of contact with other natives or with protestants (Nelson, 1983). Once the region was free from Spain, "liberal governments seeking to counterbalance the influence of the Catholic Church and conservative elements saw in Protestantism a tool for their own political ends. Thus, they accepted, and sometimes even promoted and invited, not only Protestant immigrants but also the presence of Protestant missionaries in the hope that their work would undermine conservatism. The political leaders who thus contributed to Protestant penetration into Latin America had no inclination to become Protestants themselves – in fact, most remained active within the Catholic Church, even though in constant tension with its hierarchy" (González and González, 2007, p. 206).

After its independence in 1821, Costa Rica needed to develop its economy and opened the door to foreigners, many of them protestants (British citizens involved in coffee exports, Caribbean workers building railroads, etc.) who pushed for freedom of religion and gradually built their own churches. Some became directors of important schools at the time. However, their churches were for their own use and they did not try to proselytize. It was until after the weakening of the Catholic Church by the "liberal laws" of 1884-1889, that the first evangelical missionaries, many from the United States, started to arrive in the country with the sole objective of proselytizing.

According to diaries, newspapers, and other historical records reviewed by Nelson (1983), during the early 20th Century, Costa Rican nationals were polite when evangelical missionaries approached them but changed their demeanor after community priests would hear about the meetings and admonished them. The priests would forbid Catholics from speaking with evangelicals and in some cases instigated violence against them (for example, there were several instances of angry neighbors threatening to burn houses where evangelical events took place). Also, because places like cemeteries and hospitals were managed by priests and nuns, evangelicals would often face denial of service and other forms of discrimination. The challenges also included legal restrictions to convene in public spaces and the refusal by venue owners to rent their properties for non-Catholic religious activity. As proselytizing by other religions grew, the Catholic hierarchy pressured government authorities to expel missionaries and forbid other religions.

For several decades missionaries made slow but steady progress, including with "the U.S. government's support of missionaries in Latin America in the 1950s as a bulwark against communism; the use of missionaries by the CIA in Chile, Ecuador and Bolivia; and the channeling of USAID funds to church-sponsored projects in the region" (Melkonian-Hoover and Hoover, 2008). Nelson (1983) identifies several denominations (at least five Pentecostal, four Baptist, and a few others like Lutherans, Mennonites, etc.) established in Costa Rica by the 1970s, even if some of them consisted of a single parish. In fact, differences among them led to some tensions and to an attempt to organize themselves with the launch of an evangelical alliance designed to seek evangelical unity. During the 1970s, the number of evangelicals

started to grow more significantly with the creation of schools, radio stations, and at least one newspaper (*El Mensajero*), and foreign missionaries started to prepare locals to lead and expand the churches. Ultraconservative neo-Pentecostals, in particular, grew rapidly and had in common with the Costa Rican Catholic Church their disinclination for liberation theology precepts (Nelson, 1983, p. 333). But, unlike the Catholic Church, evangelicals were not part of the political elites and their views did not receive much media coverage. For a long time, evangelicals in Latin America were more likely to be covered as a nuisance (initially with their "garage-churches" and eventually large marquee tents designed to fit thousands of people) and/or a fraud (with their claims of performing "healing" and "miracles" in front of live audiences) (Pérez, 2017, p. 20).

Evangelicals in Latin America, especially those politically organized, are for the most part the creation of American religious organizations (Feigenblatt, 2022; Cuevas, 2022). Even though they have become independent from the missions and have adjusted to their context in different ways, they maintain "an American-formulated gospel" (Melkonian-Hoover and Hoover, 2008) that includes the centrality of political ambition as a core part of their "mission". Evangelicals in Latin America have gone from fighting for religious freedom to demanding religious equality with Catholicism to seeking political power of higher stature than the Catholic Church and secular political parties (Pérez, 2017, p. 20). As their numbers grew and constituencies expanded from mostly the poor to the middle classes during the 80s and 90s, attempts to convert their symbolic capital into electoral capital

started to emerge across the region with the launch of small, religious political parties.

In Costa Rica, the first evangelical political party was created in 1986. It had no electoral success but paved the way for a separate party that elected its first legislator in 1998. Others followed suit and, by 2014, there was a "Christian block" in Congress with six legislators from five different evangelical political parties. In the 2018 election, religious voters supported mainly one evangelical party that won 14 congressional seats. Furthermore, their presidential candidate came second in the national election (though analysts largely agree this result originated in circumstantial factors rather than an organic growth in popular support for evangelical parties) (Najar, 2018).

As in the case of other Latin American countries, in Costa Rica some evangelical denominations are more engaged in politics than others and the more active ones exhibit ideas consistent with those of Christian nationalists in the U.S. Author Michelle Goldberg defines Christian nationalism as "a political ideology that posits a Christian right to rule," which rhetoric by 2020 had become notorious in the Trump administration and the Republican party. For instance, attorney general Bill Barr has called for "the imposition of God's law in America," Vice President Mike Pence considers dissent with religion as "un-American," and the 2020 National Republican Convention invited a speaker who advocates for the precedence of women's biblical submission over women's civil right to vote ("in a Godly household, the husband would get the final say" over the wife's vote) (Boston, 2018; Kuruvilla, 2019; Becker, 2020).

Similar rhetoric is present throughout Latin America. Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, an evangelical, has said, “God above all. This history of a secular state doesn't exist, no. The state is Christian and those who are against it can leave. The minority must bow to the majority” (AFP, 2018). In Peru, the third-largest legislative block as of 2020 is a messianic group that claims to be “the representative of Christ” on Earth and believes they are destined to take control of the country (Sierra, 2020). In Costa Rica, evangelical legislators sometimes read biblical quotes on the Congress floor to justify their proposals and decisions and, during the political campaign, talked about the possibility of limiting “cultural freedoms” to curb artistic activity contrary to “society’s values” (Chaves, 2018).

Rhetorical and tactical similitudes between the U.S. and Latin American religious politicians are not a coincidence. “This marriage of pastors and parties is not a Latin American invention. It’s has been happening in the United States since the 1980s, as the Christian right gradually became arguably the most reliable constituency in the Republican Party,” and “American evangelicals coach their counterparts in Latin America on how to court parties, become lobbyists and fight gay marriage” and abortion, even though in Latin America abortion it is already largely illegal except in some countries to save the life of the woman or in cases of raped minors (Corrales, 2018). For instance, Capitol Ministries, a Christian nationalist organization whose mission is to “evangelize elected and appointed political leaders and lead them toward maturity in Christ,” organizes weekly Bible studies for Trump’s cabinet members, the U.S. House of Representatives, 43 state capitols, and at least 20 legislatures in other countries – including Costa Rica. Female government officials

and legislators can be present but are not allowed to lead discussions because "there is a [Biblical] prohibition of female leadership in marriage, and female leadership in the church" (Amos, 2018).

Section 2: The Reemergence of Religious Political Ambition

The Christian nationalist rhetoric shown above may seem out of place in the secular style that reigned in the political debate of the second half of the 20th Century throughout the American continent, but is consistent with Christian nationalists' understanding of their "Godly" mandate. In the words of one of its proponents, "Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ — to have dominion in civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness. But it is dominion we are after. Not just a voice" (Grant, 1987, p. 50). Even though politically-active evangelicals usually frame their arguments with the concept of religious freedom, their demands and their rationale reveal they espouse an ideology that is "fundamentally incompatible with the Constitution" and "is on a coalition course" with the constitutional system (Stewart, 2019).

Latin American evangelical politicians are feeding a new form of populism in the region. Not only are they running in elections with their own political parties, but also creating alliances with right-wing parties. "Evangelicals are solving the most serious political handicap that right-wing parties have in Latin America: their lack of ties with nonelites. As the political scientist Ed Gibson noted, parties of the right used to draw their core constituency from the upper strata. This made them electorally

weak. Evangelicals are changing that. They are bringing in voters from all walks of life, but mostly the poor. They are turning right-wing parties into people's parties" (Corrales, 2018). The main priority for right-wing elites is usually economic policy while for religious groups the main priority is the "moral agenda," characterized by the negation of human rights on issues of sex, reproduction, marriage, and family. In that context, some conservative parties have proven willing to make concessions on human rights in exchange for religious groups' support to mobilize voters and adopt their economic agenda.

The result is the reduction of complex social issues to choices of "good" versus "evil" in which, under the rule of political coalitions "capable of infringing on rights that protect a pluralistic society and democracy," some parts of society that have been historically excluded lose the progress they gained in the previous decades (Parnell, 2019). The elimination of the rights of indigenous populations, women, and LGBT and the extended constitutional crisis in Brazil since the 2018 presidential election of evangelical Bolsonaro illustrate the seriousness of the situation. The imminent reversal of Roe v. Wade in 2022 in the U.S. is another example.

In that context, the Catholic Church (which has suffered a massive loss of adherents throughout the region but continues to have more followers than other religions) has joined evangelicals in their push for the "moral agenda," including with interventions by the Pope, an Argentinian national who is familiar with Latin American politics. "It is political opportunism on both sides to join efforts and fight to keep 'official' Christian values in society, especially in sexual and family-related

issues" (Pérez, 2017, p. 22). In its interest to cultivate such political alliances, the Catholic Church seems to be making an effort to use friendlier rhetoric toward evangelicals. For instance, the Pope has asked the president of an evangelical alliance in Argentina for advice about language that evangelicals won't find "offensive" (*La Nación*, 2018). This newly integrated Christian coalition of Catholics and evangelicals targets the same issues across the region and uses similar talking points, launches social media campaigns with the same hashtags, and spreads similar disinformation.

"These campaigns seek to continue controlling sexuality and reproduction (…) This is not casual, as through the years fundamental changes have occurred across the region in sexual and reproductive rights, through holistic sexual education, some forms of legal abortion, homosexual couple's right to adopt children, homosexual marriage, and others, changes these fundamentalist groups oppose" (González et al., 2018, p. 5). Under the umbrella of "gender ideology," churches and conservative elites promote a new version of biological determinism according to which the roles traditionally assigned to the sexes are fixed by nature and cannot be modified. According to them, any attempt to modify these roles is an attack on the family and Christian values, two concepts religious groups feel entitled to define for all of society - not just for those willingly going to their churches. From a political standpoint, "gender ideology" is then a platform that allows them to push back against both women's equality and LGBT rights (homosexual marriage, official recognition of the transexual identity, etc.).

With the use of disinformation (for example, “abortion is never necessary to save women’s lives”) and religious condemnation (for example, “gender ideology is the work of the devil”), fundamentalists and conservatives have used inflammatory communications as a strategy to influence the information flow in the context of blocking or promoting certain policies and laws. González et al. (2018) found that religious groups across South American countries use social media, TV shows, documents, graphic magazines, religious ceremonies, marches, collecting signatures for petitions, vigils, and direct lobbying in government institutions, and are alert to any changes that do not fit their views of society. In sum, the authors found that religious groups conduct “extensive political work that requires human and economic capital” (González et al., 2018, p. 8). This dissertation argues that in addition to promoting false information offline (in their churches and communities) and online (on websites and social media platforms), religious groups may also leverage journalistic coverage to insert disinformation into the fact-based news stream and reaffirm existing power asymmetries and structural silences.

One of their most successful campaigns occurred in Colombia, where “gender ideology” was the main tool for those who succeeded in defeating the approval of a peace agreement with the guerillas in a referendum. The agreement included the objective that “men, women, homosexuals, heterosexuals and persons with diverse identity participate and benefit in equality of conditions” (*Semana*, 2016). In several South American countries, with the #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas (#Don’tMessWithMyKids) campaign, religious groups succeeded in forcing governments to halt sexual education programs and sacking education ministers. The

campaign launched after sexual education programs introduced a discussion about trans sexual identities, which to fundamentalist and Catholic groups is an example of "gender ideology" telling children they can choose to be a woman or a man if they want to (Cortés, 2018; González et al., 2018).

In Costa Rica, the coalition of Catholic and evangelical churches has also targeted sexual education and some of its main priorities have been gay marriage as well as abortion to save the life and health of pregnant women. In 2018, weeks before voting day of the presidential election, the Inter American Human Rights Court – in response to a legal question the Costa Rican government had formulated a year earlier – issued a binding order for all member states to allow gay marriage and officially recognize sex change for trans individuals. The news took conservative voters by surprise and the presidential candidate of one of the evangelical political parties capitalized on it by taking a radical position and augmenting his anti-gay rhetoric. He called the Court's decision an insult to Costa Rican sovereignty and an attack against "traditional family" and "Christian values." He promised to stop same-sex marriage and to remove the country from the Court, a move that propelled him in the polls and landed him the most votes on election day. However, he did not get enough votes to skip a second round and, ultimately, lost the election to a progressive candidate who supported gay marriage and abortion to save women's life and health.

Despite the defeat, the evangelical political party became the second-largest congressional block, which gave it bargaining power to force the new government to halt sexual education programs and eliminate aspects of the curricula that religious groups disagreed with. The new government also put on hold the approval of a new

regulation to clarify a law from the 1970s that grants women the right to abortion when their life or health are in danger, also known as therapeutical abortion. For decades, doctors used their judgment to make those decisions but, as religious groups lobbied medical professional associations and launched public campaigns against therapeutical abortion, patients started being denied this right. The regulation was needed to protect patients from discretionary decisions and protect medical personnel from legal uncertainty. However, the objective of religious groups is an absolute ban on abortion in all cases, something that similar groups have already achieved in neighboring countries. In Costa Rica, after the issue of gay marriage was settled by the Inter-American Human Rights Court decision, these groups decided to focus their efforts on stopping the therapeutical abortion regulation with a multi-faceted campaign with threats against the Executive and filing complaints in the Constitutional Court. In addition, they proposed bills seeking to entirely eliminate the right to therapeutical abortion, recognize fetal personhood, extend jail time by several decades for women who have unsanctioned abortions, and other measures.

Section 3: Disinformation in God's Name

As explained, political efforts by religious groups in Latin America are usually accompanied by intense communications campaigns, which also serve an electoral purpose. In the Costa Rican case, after both evangelical parties failed to capture any mayoral seat in the municipal elections, the government announced it would end the pause and continue the process to issue the therapeutical abortion regulation and the religious groups intensified their political efforts against it. The

communication campaign against the new regulation was multi-faceted, but of interest to this dissertation is the extent to which the news media reproduced and amplified disinformation provided by religious actors.

Given the privileged position the Catholic Church has long held as part of the political elite in Costa Rica, legacy media have tended to prominently cover and even seek the bishops' views on anything from sexuality and education to the national budget and trade agreements. Evangelicals have not received the same treatment, but their arrival on the political scene has afforded them the type of news coverage and media access usually reserved for political elites. Furthermore, the shock factor of some of their inflammatory statements and/or actions often results in more media coverage, perhaps because of the potential to generate traffic on their websites and buzz on the news outlets' social media platforms. In the case of the therapeutical abortion regulation, disinformation spread by religious groups included statements with messages like the following: doctors can always save pregnant women's lives, pregnancy does not pose health risks, most of the population opposes therapeutical abortion, the regulation legalizes all types of abortions, most women regret abortions, and plans are underway to open multiple abortion clinics. Such statements received media coverage by both legacy and emerging news outlets, which is analyzed in this dissertation.

As explained in Chapter 1, the inflow of disinformation into the fact-based news stream is part of a broader phenomenon. Studies show that news consumers are exposed to disinformation not only through shady websites and anonymous content on social media but also, inadvertently, through fact-based news media (Guo and

Vargo, 2018; Gruszczynski and Wagner, 2017). This can occur when the news media amplifies false information, such as when headlines and ledes emphasize false or partly false information provided by high-level sources, or when headlines portray false information as factual and clarify it is false in less prominent parts of the stories, instead of leading with the factual information (Sullivan, 2018; Lakoff, 2018). It may also occur when journalists fall into false equivalency fallacies, such as quoting fringe voices who disseminate false information as if it is equivalent to facts or expertise (Edelson, 2012; Battistoli, 2017; Grimes, 2016). Furthermore, some studies have found intermedia agenda-setting effects, in which fake news agendas help shape the agendas of the fact-based news media (Guo and Vargo, 2018; Gruszczynski and Wagner, 2017).

Disinformation has been defined in different ways but, in essence, it is "false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit" (Buning et. al., 2018, p. 10), and it is different from misinformation in that the latter is not necessarily intended to mislead. The information analyzed in this dissertation is considered disinformation when it is false, inaccurate, or misleading but also causes public harm. This is based on the consequences of forbidding abortion to save pregnant women and girls' lives and health, as demonstrated by such a ban in neighboring Latin American countries. Examples of the consequences include death, paralysis for the rest of the patients' lives, and up to 40-year jail sentences for natural miscarriages. Arguably, some religious groups also profit from spreading disinformation electorally to polarize voters and reach broader power quotas. Once in power, they usually capture

economic privileges for their churches and leaders. For the Catholic Church, which has lost sympathizers to evangelical churches, persecuting a woman's right to life and health is also a strategy to exercise political influence, regain relevance, and protect their control of religious teaching in the public school system.

This dissertation focuses on religious disinformation and argues that it is necessary to distinguish between disinformation in general and religious disinformation. Some scholars have advocated for understanding disinformation not only in terms of the dissemination process but also in terms of the communicative roots at the heart of digital false information. "This dimension is particularly about the cultural, emotional, and narratival (sic) roots of fake news and political trolling online (…) Central to the persuasive power of digital disinformation is that they engage with powerful social narratives that people hold onto and are part of the production of social organization" (Cabañes et al., 2020, p. 3). Hochschild calls these narratives "deep stories" and describes them as "the stories that people tell themselves about who they are, what values they hold, and, ultimately, what their place in society is," which is why they "help shape, among many things, people's political choices and actions" (Cabañes et al., 2020, p. 4). Thus, these social narratives are "entangled with a country's entrenched political systems, class hierarchies, and social dynamics" (Kreiss et al., 2017, p. 470) in which the dissemination process is embedded, including whether and how they are covered by the news media.

In the case of religious disinformation, the concept of faith underpins a culture of unquestionable and usually unquestioned acceptance of any information provided by religious leaders and doctrine. This faith-based culture covers not only beliefs of a

spiritual nature (for example, whether certain behaviors are a sin under a given religion) but also factual reality (for example, whether medics can always save a woman's life), potentially dispensing religious disinformation from the healthy skepticism that citizens are generally taught to apply to information provided by politicians, the media, and other secular actors. This powerful characteristic of religious information and disinformation is recognized in laws across the democratic world, which frown upon the use of religion for political purposes. For instance, the U.S. bans political campaign activity by religious charities and churches, and Costa Rica bans religious invocations in political campaigns (some would argue the creation of political parties self-identified as evangelical is by definition a religious invocation for electoral purposes, but local electoral authorities allow them). However, journalists, as part of the cultural fabric of their societies, may also find themselves dispensing religious information and disinformation from the healthy skepticism the profession is expected to have with all actors subject to news coverage, especially elites in positions of power. Moreover, newsroom routines and dominant notions about the appropriate place for religious figures and religious values in society and politics may also be reflected in their inclusion, placement, and prominence in news coverage.

The term religious disinformation is more often found in the literature in reference to discussions about whether religious texts are misused or misinterpreted to promote a certain religious interpretation to justify a given action. For example, Hidayati, in discussing religious justification for violence against women, refers to religious disinformation as information "used to reinforce misinterpretations of

religious teaching based on textual interpretations of the scriptures." She considers interpretations that read the Quran verse "men are leaders for women" as meaning that women have to marry whoever their fathers decide as examples of religious disinformation because other interpretations exist in Islamic jurisprudence that interpret the verse as meaning that women's willingness to marry or not needs to be taken into account. (Hidayati, 2021). Bailey points at religious disinformation as one of three major factors in the spread of terrorism in the second decade of the 21st Century, and points at how ISIS disseminates fatwas (rulings on points of Islamic laws) that distort the meaning of religious texts to justify their operations, including things like gender-based crimes, beheadings of civilians, slaving "conquered" territories, etc. (Bailey, 2017).

Other scholars use the term religious disinformation in reference to issues like hate speech against religious minorities and anti-vaxxer propaganda but rarely define it. Al-Zaman uses the term religious disinformation in reference to social media disinformation that uses religious sentiment to fuel public outcry against religious minorities. They do not elaborate if the use of religious sentiment is the sole element that would distinguish it from disinformation in general (Al-Zaman, 2019), even if in further work the author theorizes the public may react differently to religious disinformation than regular disinformation because of the emotional appeal of religious stories (Al-Zaman, 2021). Anghel discusses disinformation in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of cultural benchmarks rather than content, and identifies religious disinformation as one of three main categories (general and conspiracy being the other two). She notes that religious disinformation is only

partially directed by religious bodies' interests in exploiting the pandemic because they can't control grassroots religious discourse, and points at anti-vaxxers' use of religious symbolism as an example of that (Anghel, 2021). Precisely because religious interpretation can vary widely from one religious organization or leader to another - within and across religions - and because random individuals and groups are also free to make and disseminate their own interpretations of religious belief, the question emerges of whether differences in religious interpretation can serve as a base to determine if something is false, inaccurate, or misleading and, therefore, can qualify as disinformation. In other words, since nobody has the monopoly on religious interpretation and belief can't be fact-checked, should a decision of whether an interpretation constitutes disinformation be a matter of factual validity or social acceptance instead?

Regardless of whether differences in the interpretation of religious texts can constitute a form of disinformation, the creation and use of disinformation by religious actors nowadays expands far outside solely religious discussions and texts, and well into politics and policy arenas, often engaging non-religious texts and ideas. For that reason, for the purpose of this dissertation, religious disinformation is understood as disinformation of any nature promoted by religious actors and/or disinformation that integrates religious belief into false, inaccurate, or misleading information for political or economic gain created to cause harm or for profit. This is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive of all possible factors associated with religious disinformation, but rather descriptive of the religious disinformation dealt with in this work.

Section 4: Religious Media Ecosystems

Religious groups in Latin America do not create disinformation solely for legacy and emerging news outlets, but also for their own information ecosystems. Evangelicals, for instance, have created an alternative infrastructure that resembles their U.S. counterparts. As Douglas explains, throughout the 20th century, fundamentalist Christians rejected methods, assumptions, and institutions of mainstream academic expertise that challenged literal Bible-based belief. In the U.S., "In a form of resistance, they adapted modern institutions and technologies to create bodies of counter-expertise. Christian fundamentalist Bible colleges and universities, publishers and bookstores, newspapers and magazines, radio and then television shows, museums, websites, and campus ministries, together formed a network of institutions that resisted elite, secular expert knowledge. Recognizing the power of expertise's infrastructure, Christian fundamentalists created this counter-infrastructure to cultivate and curate its alternative forms of knowledge, such as creationism and conservative Bible scholarship" (Douglas, 2018, p. 65).

A consequence of having that alternative educational, knowledge, and media ecosystem is that they "learned to distrust the proclamations of the supposedly neutral media establishment, just as they had grown to suspect the methods and conclusions of elite experts like scientists or historians." They also "learned to seek the truth from alternative sources – whether a church sermon, a Christian newspaper or book, a Christian radio or television show, or a classroom in a Christian college." Such habits paved the way for fake news and conspiracy theories to flourish with the emergence of social media and digital news outlets. Catholic infrastructure has also grown and it

tends to be more uniform and coordinated, given the control that the Vatican hierarchy continues to exercise over public messages and most officially-recognized Catholic activities.

The building of this alternative information ecosystem started before the explosion of digital technologies, quickly adapted to media convergence, and has proven to be particularly primed for the dissemination of fake news, conspiracy theories, etc., as shown by the frequent presence of religious invocations in fake news and the politicization of religious disinformation during electoral campaigns and contexts of political polarization. Latin American religious media ecosystems have been less studied, but exhibit the development of similar infrastructures (TV stations, radio stations, news outlets, non-profit organizations, universities, primary and secondary schools, political parties, etc.) in different degrees, depending on the country (Pérez, 2017).

In Costa Rica, religious media are deeply integrated with face-to-face religious events, as illustrated in studies by the Latin American Socio-Religious Studies Program (Prolades) about the modus operandi of evangelical megachurches. In a study, academic observers found a building next to the church with a coffee shop, a gift store, and a radio station streaming the two-hour service. The event was recorded on video for posting online later and/or purchase in the DVD version. Large screens projected the lyrics of anthems sung during the service, which were also available for purchase in the CD version at the end (May and Holland, 2011). Other churches regularly stream their services through social media, and their pastors stream shows during the week in which they and their guests discuss key issues in

their political agendas. For example, during the campaign against the therapeutical abortion regulation, religious media often discussed the topic in their online and radio shows. They also attempted to launch a news outlet, which shut down after it was called out by legacy and emerging news outlets for spreading fake news about the government's economic agenda.

Several evangelical TV chains operate in the country, the earliest one (called Enlace) was established in the 1980s in partnership with a U.S.-based religious organization (*Trinity Broadcasting Network*) with which it shared content as well as the objective of covering all of Latin America. As of 2020, *Enlace*'s website claims it broadcasts in 120 countries and covers "the rest of the world" through the Internet. National and regional religious online news outlets have also proliferated and become tools for religious leaders to cue their followers on their political priorities. Coverage usually includes the participation of religious figures in political races across the region, alleged attacks against religious freedom, and new developments on issues of their interest (abortion, gay marriage, contraceptives, etc.). The regional religious news outlets are Catholic, evangelical, and from other denominations and some have a global reach. For example, *ACI Group* launched as a Catholic news agency in Peru in the 1980s and gradually started publishing in five languages covering the U.S., Africa, and several European countries. In 2014, it was bought by *EWTN Global Catholic Network*, which self-describes as the largest Catholic TV network in the world (it claims to reach 85 million people in 110 countries) and was founded in Alabama in the 1980s. Its Latin American news outlet has almost two million followers on Facebook and produces several Catholic news radio shows.

Catholics also benefit from mainstream and state-owned media. Teletica, the leading TV station in the country, offers weekly Catholic mass broadcasts. State-owned TV station *Sinart* broadcasts Sunday mass as well as the rosary (a set of prayers performed using beads). In 2017, the station announced it would eliminate mass and rosary transmissions from its programming and the bishops called the decision a "disrespect" to the Virgin Mary (a figure that has higher stature in Catholicism than in other religions), a restriction against "religious freedom," and a decision tainted with "authoritarianism" (*ACI Prensa*, 2017). After calls by the Catholic Church to the President of the country, the TV station announced it would continue the transmissions though only temporarily, while it decides on more "pluralistic" programming.

As is to be expected, Christian outlets tend to present their material using news formats but do not pretend to be unbiased. Latin American legacy and emerging news outlets widely claim to follow professional journalism standards that call for fair and balanced treatment of all sources, but not much literature exists specifically focused on the issue of religion news and especially whether news coverage gives religious leaders and religious values favorable treatment. This dissertation hopes to contribute to reducing the gaps in this line of inquiry, something particularly necessary given the cultural and political prominence Christian religions have traditionally had in the region and given the current rise of Christian political ambition throughout the continent in the first decades of the 21st Century.

A 2016 study of Latin American journalists (not including Costa Rica) found that newsrooms continue to be dominated by the main ethnic and religious groups.

For instance, in the case of neighboring El Salvador, the survey found that "journalists assign great importance to religious values and institutions" and reaffirmed "the idea of a society anchored by traditional values," even though many reporters do not consider themselves religious and say religion is the "least important factor for journalistic work" (Amado et al., 2016, p. 112). This seeming contradiction can be explained with the concept of schemas or cognitive frameworks, which every person uses to organize and interpret information. Cognitive frameworks act as shortcuts that facilitate the interpretation of new information but derive from the dominant ideologies in a culture, carry bias and stereotypes, and make it seem as unnecessary to question the underlying assumptions in the culture. In Lakoff's words, "All of our knowledge makes use of frames, and every word is defined through the frames it neurally activates. All thinking and talking involves 'framing.' And since frames come in systems, a single word typically activates not only its defining frame but also much of the system its defining frame is in (Lakoff, 2012, p. 71). Thus, they can lead individuals to focus on information that confirms pre-existing notions and make it difficult to notice or retain new information that does not fit with established ideas (Rodrigo-Alsina and Cerqueira, 2019, p. 228).

In that sense, it is possible for journalists to favor or disfavor certain actors and ideas not because of their personal beliefs but based on the schemas they have acquired simply by being members of society. In the professional news model, journalists decide how to process information by following certain news values, but their judgment of the news value of a fact, an event, an actor, etc. is exercised through the lens of their own schemas. For instance, in a culture where religious figures are

perceived as leaders of national stature, journalists may consider it professionally appropriate to give prominence to their statements even if they do not personally agree with the idea. However, when such statements take place in the context of a political battle over policy or law, giving prominence to their statements over those of actors on the other side of the political struggle becomes bias, partiality, and/or religious partisanship - even if doing so may seem appropriate when seen from certain schemas. In sum, in some topics, such as politics, the notion of journalistic impartiality has been more developed than in others, such as religion. Journalists usually know to be careful about expressing or revealing partisan preferences are less so regarding religious preferences, especially in cultures where one religion is dominant and “believing” is perceived as “normal” if not a duty and a sign of being a "good citizen," such as in most countries in the American continent.

Organizational factors also intervene in journalistic coverage. The literature is sparse in this regard when it comes to coverage of religious issues in Latin American newsrooms, but it is worth noting that, when invited by a U.S. university to participate in a cross-country investigation of the role of the Trump administration in the growth of the fundamentalist agenda in the region, 16 news outlets joined the project. Between 2019 and 2020, their investigations found, for example, a multi-country international lobby funded by U.S. religious foundations to weaken Inter-American human rights bodies (such as the court that ordered countries to recognize gay marriage). They also found international agreements to support presidents involved in corruption scandals but favorable to the “moral agenda” promoted by U.S. diplomats at the time (Transnacionales de la Fe, 2018). The investigative series

suggests that in certain circumstances newsrooms and journalists in the region are willing and able to cover religion in ways that depart from traditional approaches, rigorously applying to religious activity the journalistic standards and methodologies usually applied to political actors and organizations.

Challenges in the coverage of religion are not new or unique to Latin America. For example, in *Unsecular Media* (1998), Silk extensively reviews U.S. newspapers' coverage of religious actors and shows that mainstream media "present religion from a religious rather than a secular point of view" and "news coverage of religion in America can be properly understood only as the expression of values that derive from our religious traditions" (Silk, 1998, p. xii). The author argues that religious values embedded in the U.S. culture shape journalistic norms and, unlike with other actors and institutions, mainstream media "presuppose that religion is a good thing." News stories do not deviate much from the cultural preconceptions of their culture and are a reflection of its "moral architecture."

In the U.S., religion is perceived as "good" and any aspect that does not fit that perception is seldom discussed in the media or is presented as a deviation from religion, not as a core part of it. These preconceptions are reaffirmed through a series of "topoi" or formulaic stories that border stereotypical portrayals of religious actors, institutions, and practices, both positive (for example, "good works," "tolerance," etc.) and negative (for example, "hypocrisy," "false prophesy," etc.) (Silk, 1998, p. 51). In the case of the U.S. media, Silk identifies, for example, media that portray the discriminatory treatment of women by foreign religions in a negative light but ignore or gloss over similar practices in the U.S. if conducted by widely accepted religious

institutions. Self-censorship plays a role as well. Stories about religion that deviate from what the community wants to hear can have consequences for the reporters. In the words of a journalist who covered religion, “What more volatile topic is there than religion? To write about it seriously and aggressively is to court disaster. You’re also writing about communities. There’s a sense of assault on community virtue” (Silk, 1998, p. 114).

Chapter 4: Religion Coverage and Media Pluralism

Section 1: Religion and News Media Literature

Religion and media studies is an emerging field that draws from different disciplines (history, sociology, communications, theology, etc.) to research the intersection between religion and media, with issues of interest ranging from the use of technology by religious groups over time to religious audience behaviors. Winston explains that religion and the news media is a smaller subfield, often dominated by communications scholars focused on the study of religion coverage (bias, frequency, placement, reporters' religiosity, etc.); the themes, narratives, and frames commonly used in the coverage; how coverage is structured; the questions it addresses; and the messages it communicates, both historically and in the present (Winston, 2012).

Much of the literature about religion and the news media explores complaints persistently expressed by religious actors about alleged secular biases against any given denomination or perceived media hostility against the religious sector more generally, often without providing evidence to support their claims (Buddenbaum, 2010, p. 47) and revealing an implicit expectation that journalists covering religion should adopt a pro-religion stance to cover it. The volume of religion coverage over time - especially whether and why the number of stories about religion has decreased - has also attracted the attention of scholars in this subfield, usually in connection with broader social and political phenomena. The framing and representation of non-Christian or fringe religions have been another common theme of scholarly attention,

particularly in the coverage of events like the 9/11 terrorist attacks or sects involved in violent or deadly acts (Powell, 2011; Terman, 2017; Hill et al., 2001). Another line of inquiry has focused on the topoi or "moral formulas" (e.g., good works, hypocrisy, tolerance, false prophesy, inclusion, and others) the news media commonly utilize to report on religion and the underlying views they reveal (Silk, 1998; Kerr, 2003). Journalists' religious beliefs or lack thereof have also been studied in connection with research questions about the above and other issues.

Earlier scholars in the field assumed that patterns in religion news were reflective of broader societal patterns, while authors in the religious sector accused journalism of having a secular bias, an "a-religious" worldview, and even "contempt" for religion (Silk 1991, p. 36; Buddenbaum, 2010). An often-cited study commissioned by Catholic groups in the 1990s analyzed coverage by four U.S. elite news organizations and found no evidence of journalistic hostility against religion, but concluded that half of the reporters had no religious affiliation and that sources favoring the Catholic Church's views on issues like sexual morality, church-state relations, and "Church authority" tended to be in the minority in news stories. The study authors attributed the latter to the fact that "journalists frequently approached this subject matter from a secular perspective, structuring their coverage of theological issues along the familiar lines of political reportage" (Shaw, 1993).

Responses to the study argued that secular coverage conforms to the facts and simply reflects the reality that the position of the Church on many issues is indeed a minority position in society (Winston, 2012). However, other perhaps more religiously-inclined authors and media critics consider that it is the use of a secular

perspective to cover religion per se what is problematic, and/or rewarding of dissent with religious views (Buddenbaum, 2009, p. 47; Shaw, 1993). Winston suggests that mainstream media's focus on covering institutions and powerful leaders "marginalizes what some adherents and religion scholars say are the most intriguing and dynamic aspects of belief and believing...Clergy sexual abuse and denominational debates over gay ordination fit the definition of newsworthiness, but they don't illuminate the mystery of prayer or the impact of small group fellowship" (2012, p. 14). Shaw argues that a secularist press has given "copious and respectful" attention to views dissenting with Catholic doctrine, helping bring about more dissent. Olasky goes as far as to suggest that the news media secularized its framing of religion instead of following an "overarching perspective, such as Christianity's worldview," and calls instead for "engaged, perspectival reporting anchored in the reporter's religious worldview" (Buddenbaum, 2010, p. 47; Schultze, 2003, p. 276-277).

Such arguments imply that news should go beyond newsworthiness when covering religious issues or that newsworthiness should be redefined to include reporting on "belief and believing" as news, with the explicit objective of highlighting or promoting aspects of religion lacking in news value - something that is closer to public relations pieces or proselytizing campaigns than professional journalism. Additionally, such suggestions confuse journalistic balance and fairness with notions of deliberately cherry-picking views to guarantee a favorable portrayal of religion and preempt the appearance of dissent with religious doctrine among clergy and the religious public. As we know, making such calculations is incompatible with journalism's values and standards.

This dissertation argues that at its core such positions miss the distinction between religion as a spiritual experience in the private sphere and the political agendas and actions of organized religion in the public sphere, and the implications of this key distinction in newsworthiness. While the former can at times be covered as any other human-interest feature can be, the latter has news value because of the potential or consummated impact of religious-political action on the public interest. In other words, coverage of political action by religious groups or leaders is necessary for citizens to be informed about developments that may impact them, but it does not create a journalistic duty to promote religion in news stories or help religious groups with parochial aims such as "illuminating the mystery of prayer" or controlling dissent among their ranks and followers. On the contrary, religious' groups' petitions seem to be an aftertaste from older times when religion enjoyed a preponderant place in coverage it still feels entitled to.

Even if within large segments of society religious organizations and leaders continue to enjoy certain deference and social standing, when they jump out of the religious realm and into the political arena, they should receive the same treatment and accountability standards applicable to any other political group. As some in journalism have argued, Church doctrine has no intellectual standing outside of religious circles, and "as journalists, we are under no obligation to give superior weight or credence to an institutional declaration of the Pope or the cardinals" (Harwood, 1991). "Good religion coverage should make religious leaders no happier than good political coverage makes politicians" (Silk, 1991, p. xi).

The journalistic perspective above helps explain why, despite religious complaints, many studies have found no evidence of the alleged anti-religion stance. For instance, Buddenbaum analyzed broadcast news stories in the 1970s and 1980s and found that religion was mentioned in up to 11 percent of them (up to 15 percent of the airtime) and received a fair treatment (Buddenbaum,1993). Furthermore, different studies have found a high degree of religiosity among reporters and that stories about religion have grown longer and broader over time (Buddenbaum, 1986). On the contrary, some media analysts and observers have long pointed to pro-religion biases among reporters and in news stories. For instance, after the visit of the Pope to the U.S. in 1979, journalist and historian Garry Wills wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that, “the press went belly-up” and "swooned. Instead of reporting the papal visit, journalists celebrated it like a pack of acolytes," ignoring issues like the Pope's rejection of the ordination of women or the fact that most Americans reject the Pope's teachings on birth control, abortion, and other issues.

According to him, "maintaining an air of make-believe involved the press in a complicity with the national mood, one reaching the level of self-censorship. Inflated crowd estimates were published […]. Yet when the Chicago Tribune, two weeks after the pope had gone, questioned its Grant Park crowd estimate of one million, a radio commentator on the press, John Madigan of WBBM, criticized this effort 'to try and take some of the gloss off of the papal visit' (Wills, 1980). Journalistic religious reverence and adulation for a religious figure repeated in 2008 when a different Pope visited the U.S. An article in the Columbia Journalism Review noted, "a papal visit seems to put stars in some reporters’ eyes" and that comedian John Stewart had "a lot

of fun mocking the media over the fawning coverage they gave the Pope's visit" (Rose, 2008).

Despite the above, pro-religion bias has been studied to a much lesser extent not only in the religion and news media subfield but more broadly in academia. Whether limited research about pro-religion coverage has its origins on what is acceptable public discourse about religion - as referenced by Silk - and/or on scholars' own religious beliefs is an open question, but some academics have discussed important differences in approach and depth between scholars-scientists and scholars-devotees in regard to the study of theology as a science and the philosophy of religion field (Weibe, 1984; Draper and Nichols, 2013).

Section 2: Religion and the Origin of News

The literature suggests that the tension between religion and journalism occurs because both play similar functions in their own way and have related origins. The news helps structure political priorities, articulate social concerns, and foster identities, which are functions that religion - defined by Silk and others essentially as a system of communication - played almost exclusively in the past and continues to play to a higher or lesser extent among certain segments of sympathizers. Though this has changed over time in news about most topics, "when the news media set out to communicate religious subject matter, they run up against institutions jealously guarding what they take to be their own prerogative" and see the media as usurping core religious functions (Silk, 1991). To those in religion, media's secular coverage and distance from supernatural belief "can look like indifference or worse." It also

creates clashes with a deeply-rooted habit in religious traditions to "not just blaming but demonizing" the bearers of bad news, because disrepute and challenges to its authority have historically been identified by religious circles as a threat to the faith of the community in them.

This has led to a relationship between religion and the news media that Silk characterizes as follows: "Of all institutions of American life, none demands such careful handling by the news media as religion. Government agencies, sports franchises, and even corporations can be subjected to searching criticism and ridicule in the press and over the air. Churches are another matter. Not only are Americans a highly religious people, but, in contrast to the rest of the Western world, ours is a country in which overt hostility to religion has not been legitimized by a tradition of anti-clerical politics. Religion stands outside of the established order, at least officially, and woe to those who treat it with disrespect" (Silk, 1991, p. 3). Instead of centering analysis on whether secular coverage is biased against religion, Silk (p. 10-11) has proposed studying it as a reflection of what is acceptable discourse in the public square.

The discussion about religion coverage is often also immersed in the broader debate about church and state separation, especially about the tension between the extent to which religious actors are allowed to participate in political processes to shape public policy and at what point the church and state separation line is crossed. Some authors have referred to political participation by religious groups as an "intrusion of religious bodies and individuals into secular affairs" (Harwood, 1991), given that they essentially seek to code their religious belief into laws and policies

applied to the state and to citizens without respect to individuals' freedom to choose which religious beliefs to live by or not to have religious beliefs. Those who defend religious-political participation consider that perspective as a "secularist bias," including in news coverage with which they see journalists as playing "the role of enforcers on behalf of secular culture, rewarding those who conform and punishing those who don't" (Shaw, 1993, p. 52).

The expectation on the part of religious groups and scholars that the news media go beyond newsworthiness to promote religion, ensure favorable coverage of religious organizations and individuals, and/or show deference to them is also a historical legacy from what some historians call the religious origins of news. As the literature shows, in previous centuries "religion was the news." Much information about issues ranging from politics to weather to health spread in terms of whether it signaled divine approval or disproval and came through sermons, church-approved pamphlets, etc.

With the emergence of newspapers, information about current events was gradually detached from religious significance. In the early 1700s U.S., a newspaper culture had developed and religion was pervasive. "Religious activities were regularly noted, and hymns, sermons, prayers, and scripture were featured. Political stories had a religious dimension, and reports on laws and governmental decrees noted religious motivations. Religion was a fact of life covered by the press as well as the primary means for interpreting events" (Winston, 2012, p. 7). A century later, religion had become "just another beat," but the press continued to pay "deference to established Protestant denominations, cited clergy as authoritative sources, and frequently

published ministers' opinions on the issues of the day." Coverage of clerical and congregational scandals by some outlets was harshly criticized, not just by the clergy but also by owners of other media outlets. The clergy in particular argued that the news media had a moral obligation to help improve society and, to them, improvement meant promoting a Christian worldview and its churches. Such notions had waned a century later and religious figures' opinions on politics or social behavior were less present in the media, but religion remains present in the news cycle.

On the one hand, some authors have pointed out that secular journalism today continues to be permeated with religious views and values.

Silk (1991) argues that American news media present religion from a religious rather than secular point of view because news coverage of religion is an expression of values that come from religious traditions. "To the extent that they are concerned with religion itself, the news media, far from being cut off, are animated by particular religious values that are embedded in American culture at large" (Silk, 1991, p. 11). This explains too why coverage of religion normally stays away from finding fault and displays a "preponderance of celebratory and innocuous stories" (p. 7), with the exception perhaps of investigations about a wave of sexual abuse cases covered by the Catholic Church in the early 2000s and #MeToo scandals in churches of several denominations close to the 2020s.

Nord goes a step further and argues that American journalism is deeply rooted in religious culture as evidenced by its current-event orientation, empiricism, authoritative interpretation, and an omniscient narrator. According to him, the "doctrine of divine providence" of the Puritan era and its religiously-mediated news

system served as the environment for the growth of news with "a particular methodology for identifying, gathering, reporting and publishing news stories" (Nord, 2001, p. 55).

The above is relevant to understanding religion news coverage in the Latin American context of interest to this dissertation because, as explained in Chapter 3, the journalistic culture in the region has long adopted the American professional news model. Furthermore, the characterization Winston makes of U.S. religion coverage in earlier centuries (the press "cited clergy as authoritative sources, and frequently published ministers' opinions on the issues of the day") is relevant in Latin America, as these are traits that can still be observed to different extents in news outlets across the region. However, the study of religion and the news media as its own field in Latin American countries is very limited and affected by a pro-religious and especially pro-Catholic slant that has affected the scientific study of religion.

As the literature shows, the study of religion in Latin America has been limited by excessively Catholic-centered visions that prevent adequate understandings and lead to the uncritical acceptance of basic assumptions. For instance, in the study of religious diversity, Frigerio argues that "the overdependence on the assumptions of some canonical authors, the excessive equation of 'identities' with 'beliefs' and the favoring of overinstitutionalized visions of religion, as well as the scant attention paid to the different modes of religious regulation, provide an exaggerated view of a 'Catholic Latin America'" (Frigerio, 2018).

In Costa Rica - of particular interest to this research - studies of religion and the media focused on the role of Catholic newspapers in the 20th Century, pushing

back against efforts by liberal politicians to curb religious-political demands such as maintaining control of religious education in public schools. Some research found that the secular press contributed to the spread of non-religious ideas among the population (Molina, 2004). However, after the Church regained control of religious education mid-20st Century and during the Cold War, the clergy consolidated their political status in elite circles and leading conservative media.

Literature about religion and the media also investigated the impact of news on how religions construct a public identity. Religion manifests itself explicitly in the news cycle in two ways: first, as a subset of politics, including policy processes and politics within religious institutions, and, second, in an experiential dimension as faith, spirituality, and denominational values. The former tends to receive more news coverage. The literature suggests this practice can affect what the public knows as religion due to journalism's role in setting news agendas, reinforcing the status quo, and maintaining cultural hegemony. "Decisions about sourcing, reporting, and framing stories do more than convey information. They mainstream certain issues, ideas, and personalities while marginalizing others. In conjunction with issues of time, space, and resources, decisions about newsworthiness can skew public perceptions about fundamental religious tenets" (Winston, 2012, p. 14-15).

Beneath religious groups' complaints of negative and insufficient coverage is recognition that news can legitimize and strengthen certain actors over others. As context communicated within a text, that framing can infuse greater relevance to an actor or issue (Kerr, 2002). Kerr defines this process as a social power, which can cast

certain religious communities as a minority or construct what consider to be mainstream religious norms, according to studies in religion and media.

The effects of news coverage have also been studied to the extent that "knowing what type of information is out there is very important given that treatment of religious groups is tied to the kinds of information available to citizens" (Stout, 2003, p. 2). The literature indicates that support-oriented frames have helped facilitate revivalism and religious fervor in the late 19th century U.S., while negative frames contributed to ostracizing and persecuting Jews in Nazi Germany (Stout, 2003). Stout argues that "there is some relationship between media framing and social processes such as religious assimilation and accommodation." Other processes, such as the ups and downs of religion's cultural hegemony, have long concerned religious institutions and leaders.

Much of the research in religion and media focuses on religious groups' complaints about alleged biases against them or perceived insufficient coverage about them and their faith. Complaints typically detail how news portrays or constructs a range of religious denominations and institutions. There seems to be an underlying assumption that potential bias exists only against religion and that religion is entitled to news coverage or coverage with softer standards than those applied to other political and social actors. Less research has focused on how media may use the social power described by Kerr and Stout to legitimate and strengthen religious doctrines, institutions, and leaders while marginalizing groups – such as those whose rights, freedoms, and cultural standing are attacked by churches (e.g., women, the

LGBT community, agnostics, and those who support their causes in political and religious spheres).

Previous research posed questions such as, is there a bias against religion? How are stereotypes constructed about religious communities? Is religion as an experiential phenomenon being sufficiently covered? Similar to the media, some scholarship followed Silk's calls for acceptable discourse in the public square that assumes religion is inherently good or necessary and in the same category as concepts like freedom, democracy, and peace.

This has obscured the possibility of understanding the power relationships and unbalances communicated and, more importantly, legitimated in coverage about religion. This dissertation proposes the use of media pluralism theory to explore the issue.

Section 3: Media Pluralism and Democratic Political Competition

Media pluralism has long been a concern in democratic societies because of journalism's key role in enabling and supporting a free and robust public debate arena in which all citizens can participate. Public debate has a central place in democratic political systems where groups are meant to organize and compete with others to influence the exercise of political power in public matters that directly or indirectly affect them. Because much of that public debate takes place in the news media, journalism serves the function of distributing communicative power. Excluding an actor from it fundamentally impairs or denies its access to participate in the free

political power competition upon which the concept of democracy rests, and vice versa.

The linkages between journalism and the distribution of communicative power in the context of political competition have been acknowledged by political and communication theories using lenses such as the free marketplace of ideas, the public sphere, deliberative democracy, and others that focus on the range of views, conditions of public debate, and the contestability of public policies as a source of democratic legitimacy (Karppinen, 2018, p. 5; Girard, 2014, p. 283).

This essential function of journalism has led to regarding it as different than other goods and services and as deserving of special protections and regulations, including those intended to ensure media pluralism. At the same time, it is generally understood that "complete equality of actual communicative power" is not possible (Baker, 2007, p. 10). The assumption that in a free marketplace of ideas those with better arguments will gather larger audiences and prevail has proven unrealistic in practice. Not only do those who control the media exercise greater influence over what audiences will pay attention to, but minorities face a larger range of challenges related to systemic inequalities and obstacles such as lesser education and limited resources to dedicate to the political debate and, especially, to the articulation and dissemination of their points of view. In that sense, it is possible to say that which point of view prevails in media political arenas does not necessarily depend on the best argument but often on the best argument as promoted and judged by advantaged groups in society.

In recognition of these obstacles, states in most of the democratic world have been entrusted with putting into place legislative and policy frameworks to ensure "the availability, findability and accessibility of the broadest possible diversity of media content as well as the representation of the whole diversity of society in the media" (Stasi, 2020, p. 4). The need for inclusion has been explicitly linked to the deciding role that communicative power plays in the success or failure of any given actor in the democratic political competition. "Indeed, one purpose of regulation must be to promote equal conditions of competition among all sectors of society by guaranteeing special rules that allow access to groups traditionally marginalized from mass communication. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has also endorsed this idea, stating: Freedom of expression requires that the communication media are potentially open to all without discrimination or, more precisely, that there be no individuals or groups that are excluded from access to such media" (Mendel, 2017, p. 18).

In the United Kingdom, the legal framework has articulated such regulations as necessary because "achieving a workable approach to plurality, particularly in provision of news and current affairs, is generally considered fundamental to a well-functioning democratic society, ensuring as far as possible informed citizens and a media without any single set of views or individuals wielding too much influence over the political process" (Wilding, 2018, p. 104). The relationship between media pluralism and democracy has also been acknowledged in the United States, where media ownership diversity has been set as a policy objective and specific types of ownership identified as desirable (minority, female, program, outlet, and viewpoint).

In Latin America, the approach has varied across countries and over time, and media pluralism has often been invoked to target media concentration and/or to create state-owned media (Forelle, 2015, p. 3434). Specific regulations in the region have been the result of arrangements between political elites and media owners in some cases and of public pressure by social movements in others (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2018, p. 193).

Section 4: Defining Pluralism and Its Implications for Journalism

Despite general agreement about the need for plural media, there is no consensus about the concepts of pluralism, plurality, diversity, and inclusiveness, what they entail for journalism more specifically, or how to evaluate the extent to which they are present in a media system. Approaches to these concepts have emerged in large part as state institutions tasked with creating media pluralism policy attempt to determine how to formulate and achieve that goal, sometimes without explicit definitions, using the terms interchangeably, or giving them different interpretations.

In normative and policy discussions, the focus has been on the supply side, with source and content diversity as functions of the media market structure. "Despite decades of debate on diversity as a policy objective, however, there is no consensus on a generally accepted, consistent definition of what constitutes 'diversity' or 'pluralism', even at the level of supply" (Helberger et al., 2018, p. 193). Then, with the incursion of digital technologies, the consumption side has attracted attention in academic and policy circles interested in understanding how exposure pluralism may be affected by technological changes, given that algorithms and personalization

features can substantially limit the range of content consumers are exposed to regardless of how much content is available.

The general assumption in media pluralism scholarship and policy is that diverse media ownership leads to a wide range of sources (source pluralism), which are supposed to offer a full range of ideas (content or viewpoint pluralism) and allow citizens to consume all the information they need (exposure pluralism) to fulfill their democratic responsibilities (Napoli, 1999). Thus, because source diversity has been theorized to lead to content diversity – the assumption being that the more media owners there are, the more viewpoints will be included and heard – much of the focus has been placed on media ownership as a proxy for pluralism, oftentimes obscuring the need to have discussions about the actual presence or absence of viewpoint diversity in the media.

While some research has found a statistically significant relationship between ownership and content, the "causal relationship between source diversity and content diversity has, at various times, been questioned, and research addressing this relationship has not provided definitive evidence of a systematic relationship" (Napoli, 2011, p. 248).

Furthermore, the tacit presumption that democratic pluralism and viewpoint diversity are equivalent doesn't hold, as it can be argued that it is possible to include diverse viewpoints and still exclude others. As Tambini notes, "to guarantee source pluralism is not necessarily to guarantee content pluralism. (A variety of sources may put out similar programme formats and viewpoints, and all may neglect ethnic minorities). Equally, the mere provision of a variety of types and sources of content

does not exclude the possibility that the vast majority of a given audience might be exposed to a particular source and type of content" (2011, p. 27-28). In other words, diversity can coexist with exclusion but an exclusionary media cannot be considered a plural media in the democratic sense described above.

If media source and content diversity do not equal media pluralism, it is necessary to examine what exactly is understood as media pluralism and media diversity.

Hitchens (2006, p. 8-9) understands pluralism and diversity in terms of the characteristics of a plural media environment: pluralism refers to a media environment structured to ensure a diversity of media types and media owners, while diversity refers to a media environment with diverse content and points of view. She also uses the terms "external pluralism" in reference to structural regulations focused on the former and "internal pluralism" in reference to content regulations focused on the latter. It should be noted that some authors propose further classifications, such as dividing external pluralism into two categories of structure and reception (or exposure, depending on the author) and internal pluralism into three categories of organization, production, and output (Sjøvaag, 2016, p. 2). Hitchens also argues that competition and content regulations are often articulated on the basis of the importance of the media's role in the democratic process but have actually been "skewed by a futile focus on the different regulatory treatment of the press and broadcasting, which is adversely influencing current policy debates" (Hitchens, 2006, p. 8). Instead, she proposes using the concept of the public sphere as the point of reference to assess pluralism regulatory reforms.

Karppinen also distinguishes between pluralism and diversity but bases the distinction on a different aspect. “I assume a rough conceptual hierarchy whereby diversity is understood in a more neutral, descriptive sense, as heterogeneity at the level of media contents, outlets, ownership or any other aspect deemed relevant; whereas pluralism, as a broader socio-cultural and evaluative principle is understood as the acknowledgment and preference of such diversity […] In other words, I use the concepts of diversity or plurality primarily in a more empirical sense, while pluralism, as an “ism”, refers more explicitly to a normative orientation that considers multiplicity and diversity in journalism a value’ (Karppinen, 2018, p. 6). He argues that pluralism as a broader societal value requires discussing the role of journalism and other media with regard to how they alter the distribution of communicative power and influence in society. Since journalism can challenge existing truths and empower new voices, but also homogenize cultures, reinforce existing power relations, and generate social conformity, then the concerns about pluralism and diversity are about challenging or reinforcing existing asymmetries in communicative power.

“If pluralism is to serve as a critical concept in the context of journalism, we must then be able to distinguish the sheer number of voices, differences between those voices, and above all their relationship with existing power structures in society. As a consequence, pluralism in journalism can be understood to be more about power relations and less about counting the number of content options or outlets” (Karppinen, 2018, p. 24-25). The challenge is that such an understanding of pluralism can vary according to the normative framework of journalism that one adopts.

Additionally, regardless of the practical implications of any such framework, there are open questions about what the exercise of journalism should consist of and these have only become more complex as digital technologies add new dynamics to media environments.

Wilding also uses the term pluralism as a normative concept associated with the philosophical preference for a "vibrant, democratic media environment" but introduces a distinction between diversity and plurality, which Karppinen uses indistinctly. Wilding sees diversity as a "qualifying term to refer to specific aspects such as viewpoint diversity, cultural diversity, ownership diversity and exposure diversity," and defines plurality as a core regulatory concept that captures at least some of the variations of diversity mentioned above and expands into aspects of impact and influence over public opinion and the political agenda (Wilding, 2018, p. 109). Plurality, in his view, "captures the sense of *factual heterogeneity*, while avoiding the narrowness of 'diversity' and the expansiveness of 'pluralism,'" and is conceptually clearer to guide the design of the pluralism measurement tools that often inform policy.

Wilding acknowledges that "accounting for 'news media voices' requires an understanding or more than just ownership" and number of voices, and that "social inclusiveness" is part of a more comprehensive concept of media pluralism, but suggests excluding inclusiveness issues from the media plurality regulatory framework because "the criteria are inevitably subjective with little evidence available" (Wilding, 2018, p. 117). However, it is debatable that inclusiveness

indicators are necessarily more "subjective" than those around issues of ownership or content as alleged proxies for pluralism or diversity.

As pointed out by other authors above, decisions to consider diversity of ownership and content as equivalent to pluralism do not respond to self-evident truths, vary across authors and national contexts, and in many cases fail to account for pluralism and diversity in journalism – depending on the perspective and criteria chosen to approach pluralism and journalism. More importantly, the normative desirability or rationale of a principle should not be limited or determined by the convenience or inconvenience of assessing it in practice. While it may be easier to count media owners than to assess whether news stories are suppressing or minimizing certain voices, this does not justify reducing the conceptual understanding of pluralism to a counting exercise. Similarly, in many jurisdictions regulating market concentration is considered desirable while regulating what the press publishes is not, but that does not mean that essential questions about actual media pluralism should be avoided or left unsolved.

Section 5: Political Competition, Inclusion, and Exclusion

Following on the premise that social inclusiveness is part of a more comprehensive concept of media pluralism, it is necessary to point out that the concept is often used indistinctly with terms such as inclusion, inclusivity, diversity, and representation (Siochrú and Blion, 2014). Additionally, inclusiveness is often

undefined and/or not mentioned in the context of pluralism theory. Perhaps the most explicit attempt to define it as a dimension of media pluralism is by Europe's human rights institution, the Council of Europe, in its Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM). The MPM assesses media pluralism across European countries using indicators divided into five broad categories (basic protections, market plurality, political independence, social inclusiveness, and digital dimensions), and defines social inclusiveness as "access to the media by various social and cultural groups, such as minorities, local/regional communities, people with disabilities, and women" (Brogui, 2018, p. 5).

The indicators break down specific factors considered key for access to a participatory media system and media pluralism, among them media literacy (understood as the skills necessary to enjoy fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and access to information) and the "availability, comprehensiveness and implementation of gender equality policies" in both public service and private media. The indicators use dimensions of internal plurality such as organization (exact proportion of women in management boards, executive positions, and newsrooms) and content (the extent to which women are represented in content programming). Over time, the indicators have evolved to capture more minute data and have found that "the deeper one digs, the more inequality will be discovered" (Brogui, 2018, p. 65).

As mentioned, social inclusiveness is sometimes used indistinctly with terms such as inclusion, inclusivity, diversity, and representation. Aside from diversity,

representation has perhaps received more attention but it is not equivalent to inclusiveness. According to Tuchman, media representation symbolizes or signifies social existence and announces to mass audiences the social characteristics that are valued and approved about an actor or institution, but it also does the opposite: symbolize social insignificance – what she calls symbolic annihilation – and social characteristics that are devalued and disapproved (Tuchman, 2000, p. 154). For Dwight et al. (2006, p. 298), media representation is the social construction of identities related to sex, race, LGBT, etc. by the media, which contributes to the understanding of such identities by society as well as the attributes that will be associated with them. Ahmed and Matthes (2017, p. 221) conceptualize media representation as the stories, images, and other symbols provided by the media through which society organizes common culture and knowledge, usually drawing from dominant social values and ideologies that lead to stereotypical portrayals of minorities.

As can be seen, inclusiveness is concerned with the ability to use the media and equality of access to the media while representation is concerned with media portrayals – or lack thereof, in Tuchman's symbolic annihilation – of actors. The main difference is that the former assumes citizens as autonomous political actors that can and should have the possibility of speaking for themselves, while the latter focuses solely on how they are acted upon by the media. In that sense, this dissertation argues that inclusiveness emerges as a key aspect of pluralism in that it breaks through the limitations of diversity and/or plurality as a simple range of choices and viewpoints that fail to account for the coexistence of certain exclusions.

If inclusiveness can account for different actors' ability or inability to use media and the extent to which they have or lack access to both the organizational and the content dimensions of media environments in issues that directly affect them, then the concept can throw light on the conceptual limitations discussed earlier of diversity that coexists with exclusion and diverse media that excludes some.

The challenge is determining who exactly should be included in journalistic stories and how, which are questions that do not have simple answers.

Section 6: Inclusiveness, Pluralism's Missing Piece

Scholars tend to describe pluralism as a normative principle for journalism but how the concept is interpreted – and the practical implications that such interpretations have for journalism – vary depending on normative ideas about the role of journalism more broadly. Using McQuail's normative frameworks, Karppinen elaborates that under the "reflection" framework the role of plural journalism would consist of reflecting the existing political and cultural standings in a proportionate way. On the other hand, under an "equality" framework, journalism would be expected to give equal access to all points of view regardless of their perceived popularity among the population. Similarly, under the "choice" framework the emphasis would be on the range of available sources, and under the "openness" framework the emphasis would be on offering "new ideas and voices for their own sake" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 9).

However, such distinctions suffer from the same fault as the concept of pluralism: they lack explicit, widely-accepted practical implications for the exercise of journalism. For instance, core journalistic prescriptions of fairness, balance, and impartiality are generally accepted in most journalism frameworks and, in theory, are there to ensure that all stakeholders in a political battle will be included in the distribution of communicative power. But empirically open questions and debate exist about those and other core journalistic prescriptions. For example, as Benham finds in a review of scholarship about journalistic balance, the term is often used interchangeably with concepts like bias, objectivity, fairness, and neutrality, and definitions tend to be narrow (Benham, 2019, p. 793).

Some define balance as "each side being told" and presenting "the views of legitimate spokespersons of the conflicting sides in any significant dispute, and provide both sides with roughly equal attention" (Entman, 1989). Others suggest that balance also involves "providing to the viewer both the essential context and fact-checking of those claims" (Benham, 2019, p. 793). Hearns-Branaman says that including all sides is insufficient to determine balance if placement and emphasis within the stories are not also considered (Hearns-Branaman, 2016, p. 62). Furthermore, what balance should look like is not necessarily clear. For example, in a study with US journalists, the majority of participants said their organization follows a rigorous editorial process to ensure the news is balanced. However, "they also said that standards for balance were assumed within their respective organizations" rather than explicitly outlined and discussed, and they felt there is a need to "expanding beyond the traditional two-side model of news reporting, citing numerous examples,

including recently within the political sphere, where only having two sides of a news report created an unbalanced story" (Benham, 2019, p. 18).

On the other hand, going beyond the two-side model points to other unanswered questions about what diverse journalism involves. "While all agree in principle that a wide range of social, political, and cultural values, opinions, information, and interests should find expression through journalism, does that imply that all views are equal? […] Is there not a point at which healthy diversity turns into unhealthy dissonance? Does pluralism mean that anything goes? And what exactly are the criteria for stopping the potentially endless multiplication of valid ideas?" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 8). From a pluralism perspective, these and other questions about diverse journalism can be traced back to the limitations of approaches to pluralism that privilege diversity almost as an end on itself over pluralism as the connection between journalism and the distribution of communicative power in the context of democratic political competition, therefore making diversity a concept that fails to provide criteria or points of reference to guide decisions about who should be included and when.

Instead, this dissertation argues that if we understand pluralism also as a function of power relations in the context of political competition – rather than as a function of the range or number of outlets or content choices in a political vacuum – it follows that those directly involved and/or directly affected by a political struggle should have priority over others only indirectly affected or not affected at all in order for journalistic balance to be achieved. Furthermore, those whose communicative power in a political competition would be harmed or effectively silenced if excluded

from media coverage should also be covered, or at least be ensured their voice won't be excluded from influential democratic media arenas. This could be represented with the concept of inclusiveness or inclusive journalism, if understood as the absence of exclusion of incumbent actors from debates about issues that directly affect them and that take place in influential news media arenas.

Similar inferences can be made regarding other aspects of journalism such as fairness, bias, and impartiality in relation not just to inclusion or exclusion but also to how inclusion takes place when it does. Do certain actors who are incumbent in a political competition receive less space or are less prominent in news stories than their opponents, even when the results of the competition would affect them more directly? Do all sides engaged in a political competition receive a similar level of scrutiny or fact-checking of the information they provide, or do some of them get a pass to spreading disinformation? In the context of digital technologies that have lowered the barriers of entry into media environments and increased owner, outlet, and content diversity, are actors whose voices have traditionally been excluded from media arenas now more likely to be included? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this dissertation, using the case of legacy and emerging journalistic coverage of the political battle about the right to abortion to save a woman's life or health in Costa Rica.

An approach to pluralism that involves inclusiveness or inclusive journalism in the terms described above may not be possible to enforce or measure through the same types of regulations applicable to media ownership and competition because it would imply regulating not just the structure of the market but also the content of the

press, something broadly considered undesirable in most democratic jurisdictions. However, that does not mean that a well-rounded understanding of pluralism should not be clarified at a normative and practical level that can be aspired to in journalistic practice.

Chapter 5: Method

Section 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis

This study employs quantitative and qualitative content analysis to quantify variables (use of numerical representations), organize the researcher's coding to find patterns, themes, and meaning that explain a given phenomenon (Mertler, 2018), and to draw insights from the "media's symbolic environment" and what it says about society (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 31-32). Neuendorf defines content analysis as a "message-centered methodology" consisting of summarizing "quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity- intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing)" (Neuendorf, 2002). In Neuendorf's view, the following aspects are key in the use of the quantitative approach:

- *Objectivity-Intersubjectivity*: The quantitative approach follows the standard of intersubjectivity ("do we agree it is true?" rather than "is it true?)," which acknowledges that "all human inquiry is inherently subjective" but aims for consistency across inquiries.
- *A Priori Design*: Combining "induction and deduction," exploratory work, and the design of a coding structure are part of the process followed before decisions about variables, measurement, and coding are made and observations start.
- *Reliability*: In quantitative content analyses, "the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials" (including a level of agreement between human coders or intercoder reliability) is considered "paramount" for the success of the analytical approach.

- *Validity:* "The extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects what humans agree on as the real meaning of a concept" is essential to ensure that what is being measured is really what the study aims to analyze. In quantitative content analyses, a priori coding definitions ensure validity using a systematic approach to discover trends and observations that intercoder reliability confirms.
- *Generalizability:* This characteristic is generally understood as the extent to which the findings of a study may be applied to other cases, "usually to a larger set that is the defined *population* from which a study's sample has been drawn."
- *Replicability:* Quantitative content analyses create the expectation that "*repeating* a study with different cases or in a different context, checking to see if similar results are obtained each time," as a "safeguard against over-generalizing the findings of one particular research endeavor."
- *Hypothesis Testing*: Using a "deductive scientific model," quantitative content analysis poses a hypothesis (or research questions when the theory is not "strong enough") before data are collected that can then be contrasted with the results of the analysis.

"One of the underlying tenets of quantitative research is a philosophical belief that our world is relatively stable and uniform, such that we can measure and understand it as well as make broad generalizations about it," as long as they are verified through direct observation (Mertler, 2018, p. 108). Therefore, this research focuses on observing, describing, and explaining predefined aspects of the subject matter under explicitly defined variables and linear steps of data collection that guide the research process. Another characteristic of the quantitative approach is the use of large samples to ensure that the study's results mirror a substantially larger

population. The data analysis and interpretation techniques are statistical so, if other researchers replicate the study, they are expected to obtain the same results.

As with any content analysis, the quantitative approach is not without threats to validity.

Some critics of the method argue it can overemphasize the relative frequency of different symbols, miss meaningful latent content, and privilege "precision at the cost of problem significance" (though this can also be a researcher's rather than a method problem). Others recommend a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to complement each other (Riffe et al., 2014). The triangulation of methods "strengthens the researcher's claims for the validity of the conclusions drawn where mutual confirmation of results can be demonstrated," but it is not the most common type of research (Neuendorf, 2002).

This dissertation uses a non-experimental descriptive research design, in which variables are studied as they naturally occur without researcher interference. Specifically, this research applies an observational approach to describe and interpret the variables by quantifying aspects of interest based on several criteria defined in the codebook and relevant literature, complemented by qualitative analysis.

Kleinheksel et al. (2020) also note that in the analysis of manifest content reliability is necessary to increase validity. In other words, a high intercoder agreement is considered sufficient. While a lack of agreement between coders can threaten validity, the opposite can be true for latent pattern content analysis. Higher reliability improves consistency, but the coding may be too narrow or specific to represent a broader population.

Quantitative content analysis is an appropriate approach to incorporate into this dissertation because the goal is to identify and describe verified patterns in key variables coded in manifest characteristics of published news coverage. This study's focus is on certain characteristics of the coverage rather than on the process that produced them. Similarly, news consumers' interpretations of the articles or the impact the coverage may have had on a given political context are not of interest in this analysis.

At the same time, this analysis is not intended to produce generalizable findings of the news coverage of topics like religion or abortion in general or about the media's treatment of disinformation more broadly because news organizations, media systems, political contexts, and journalists' approaches can vary enormously. However, the coding scheme is intended to be generalizable and can be reused to measure any news coverage following a media pluralism framework focused on the communicative power distribution function of the media.

Using media pluralism theory, this analysis explores whether secular news coverage of religion can serve as a conduit for the spread of disinformation and marginalizing narratives, with theoretical implications on the balance of power relations in a democratic arena. The analysis seeks to investigate whether religious sources can receive more and more favorable secular media attention in the context of a specific political process than other actors directly involved in it, such as those whose human rights are opposed by religious actors. More specifically, it seeks to determine the extent to which secular news coverage applies basic journalistic rules –

such as fact-checking – to information from religious sources or repeats their false information without identifying it as such, as compared to other sources. It also explores how the inclusion and prominence of religious actors in the news stories compare to that of non-religious actors involved in a specific political process, and whether coverage by emerging media outlets - which have introduced more ownership and source diversity - shows any differences with coverage by legacy media in terms of pluralism.

The qualitative analysis is then important to combine observation of the text with the specific context in which it occurred in order to produce richer explanations and balance description with interpretation, with the latter being more feasible when working with small enough samples such as the one collected for this dissertation. There are different approaches to qualitative content analysis. Neuendorf sees it as the analysis of rhetoric, narrative, and discourse; Hsieh and Shannon as a method for identifying themes or patterns through a systematic classification or coding; and Morse and Field as a method to explore fundamental meanings of the content (Neuendorf, 2002; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Morse and Field, 1995). Shoemaker and Reese describe it as the endeavor of identifying and uncovering what the media say about society, which they refer to as the "media's symbolic environment," while Zhang and Wildemuth consider the objective of the qualitative analysis is to explore the meanings of a phenomenon over any statistical significance particular texts or concepts may have (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2017). Patton recommends balancing description and interpretation by providing "sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation, and

sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to understand the description" (Patton, 2002, p. 503).

Different approaches can be used with qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three they call conventional (content categories are derived from the text), directed (the analysis starts with a theory or research findings as guidance for the initial codes), or summative (manifest content analysis as a base to discover underlying meanings of the words or content). Regarding the directed approach, Hsieh and Shannon say it uses existing theory and research to focus the research questions and organize the initial coding scheme, which provides guidance about the variables of interest and the relationships among the variables. The goal then is to conceptually validate or extend a theoretical framework or theory. This dissertation uses a directed approach with codes defined to operationalize aspects of media pluralism theory and commonly discussed considerations about research from the religion and news media literature, which has not quite generated what could be considered theory.

Section 2: Sample and Coding Categories

The sample for this analysis consists of news articles published digitally by the top three legacy news organizations and the top three emerging news outlets in Costa Rica. The selection of the three legacy news organizations reflects the country's leading national dailies, which happen to also be the oldest media organizations in the local market at the time of this research. The choice of the three emerging outlets is based on web traffic statistics by Alexa.com, an Amazon global

traffic tool that ranks websites per country according to their average daily unique visitors and pageviews. The country-specific ranking reflects how a given website ranks relative to other websites in the country during the previous month (Alexa, 2020). At the time of this research, the website ranking third in the country - following Google and YouTube – was an emerging news outlet. This outlet also had more Facebook followers than any other news website, emerging or legacy. This reflects a departure from audience behavior in previous decades when traditional media news outlets attracted more news consumers.

The period of study starts in May 2018, when the new administration was inaugurated and announced it would temporarily suspend the process to issue the abortion protocol, and ends in December 2019, when the protocol was issued. Even though political debates about the protocol extend before and after those dates, this period of study captures the news coverage during the most decisive points of the process, including legal actions, political negotiations, marches and protests, discussion of alternative bills, communication campaigns (i.e., documentaries, public statements, religious propaganda, etc.).

The unit of analysis is a news story that meets the following characteristics:

- provides coverage about the protocol and surrounding debate,
- was published online,
- appeared in one of the selected legacy and emerging outlets, and
- was published during the period of study.

The sample was obtained with a search using the keywords “norma técnica” (which means “technical norm” and is how the protocol is commonly referred to in

the country) and “aborto” (which means abortion). Stories that mentioned the protocol in passing but focused on other topics were excluded from the sample. Opinion pieces and stories about similar issues in other countries were also excluded. The search produced 480 news stories, which is sufficiently large to conduct analyses. A dataset was created with information about headlines, sub-headlines (when present), the complete text of each story, date of publication, and outlet name.

The dataset was coded using a coding scheme that organized the parameters of the content analysis in categories and subcategories. Based on the literature reviewed, the coding operationalized the main concepts underlying the research questions, segmenting the concepts into the categories and indicators below.

1. Inclusion/Exclusion: This category refers to the inclusion or exclusion of the position or version of all three main actors involved in the issue (Government, Women’s Groups, and Religious Groups). It is coded as follows:

> ***1.1 Inclusion***: This refers to whether a news story includes the position or version of all three main actors (Government, Religious Groups, and Women’s Groups) involved in the issue of the abortion protocol. It also codes the extent of the position or version included.
>
> > *1.1.1 Yes*: This refers to a news story that includes the position or version of all three main actors (Government, Women’s Groups, Religious Groups). A position or version is considered included when quoted or mentioned in the news story. The actor's position or version could be a quote - or the paraphrasing of one - from an interview conducted for that story or extracted from press releases, statements given to other media outlets, social media posts, etc., concerning the issue reported. Citing

older, related quotes or information by the actor to a news outlet or disseminated through other means is also coded as a form of inclusion.

1.1.2 No: This refers to a news story that does not quote or mention the position or version of all three sources in the conditions outlined immediately above.

1.1.3 Inclusion Type: This refers to the extent of the inclusion for each of the three sources in the stories coded as *Yes*.

1.1.3.1 Government: This refers to whether a news story includes the position or version of the government in a significant or minimal way. Significant is considered as more than one paragraph and Minimal as one paragraph or less (for example, one sentence or two lines).

1.1.3.2 Religious Groups: This refers to whether a news story includes the position or version of the religious groups in a Significant or Minimal way. Significant is considered as more than one paragraph and Minimal as one paragraph or less (for example, one sentence or two lines).

1.1.3.3 Women's Groups: This refers to whether a news story includes the position or version of the women's groups in a Significant or Minimal way. Significant is considered as more than one paragraph and Minimal as one paragraph or less (for example, one sentence or two lines).

1.2 Exclusion: This refers to a news story that excludes the position or version of any of the three main actors (Government, Religious Groups, Women's Groups) involved in the issue of the abortion protocol. A story that contains the

position or version of only one or two of the main three actors but not all three was coded as exclusion. Each story is also coded to indicate which of the three actors is/are excluded.

1.2.1 Women's Groups: This refers to a news story that does not quote or mention the position or version of Women's Groups, whether it is one group or a coalition of them.

1.2.2 Religious Groups: This refers to a news story that does not quote or mention the position or version of Religious Groups, whether it is one group or a coalition of them.

1.2.3 Government: This refers to a news story that does not quote or mention the position or version of the Government, whether as a unit (the Executive branch) or a representative (President, Ministry of Health officials, etc.).

1.2.4 One Source (Government): This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of only one source and that source is the government.

1.2.5 One Source (Religious Groups): This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of only one source and that source is a Religious Group.

1.2.6 One Source (Women's Groups): This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of only one source and that source is a Women's Group.

1.2.7 One Source (Other Sources): This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of only one source and that

source is none of the three main actors involved in the protocol process.

1.3 Other Sources: This refers to whether a news story quotes or mentions the position or version of other actors such as secular political parties, medical experts, judiciary, commentators, etc., regardless of whether the story includes the three main actors.

1.3.1 In Favor: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of other actors who are *in favor* of the protocol.

1.3.2 Against: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of other actors who are *against* the protocol.

1.3.3 Both: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of two or more *Other Sources*, with at least one *in favor* and one *against* the protocol.

1.3.4 Neutral/Unclear: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of *Other Sources* neutral about the protocol and/or whose positions cannot be deducted from the information provided in the story.

1.3.5 Other Type: This refers to the type of *Other Sources* whose position or version is included in a news story. The coders describe the type (pollsters, professional associations, judiciary, etc.).

2. Voice Type: This refers to the types of actors whose positions or versions are mentioned or quoted in a news story according to whether they are elites or nonelites.

2.1 Elite: This refers to actors known to have a strong influence on government decision-making processes and high communicative power. Having a strong influence on government decision-making is understood as being part of formal negotiations or dialogue processes where public policy decisions are made. High communicative power is understood as being often covered by the news media. In Latin America, the literature suggests such actors typically include political parties, economic groups, churches/religious leaders, professional unions, etc. Given their position as impartial judges, courts are coded as "*Other Sources*."

2.1.1 Religious organizations: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of churches and/or their clergy.

2.1.2 Political Secular: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of political parties, their representatives, and/or high-level members (secretary-general, legislators, etc.).

2.1.3 Political Religious: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of religious political parties, their representatives, and/or high-level members (secretary-general, legislators, etc.).

2.1.4 Professional Associations: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of professional associations or their representatives (medical, legal, etc.)

2.1.5 Business: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of business associations or their representatives.

2.1.6 Other: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of other elite sources such as the courts (national and international), international organisms, foreign governments, etc.

2.2 Nonelite: This refers to actors known to have little or no influence on government decision-making processes and low or no communicative power. In Latin America, the literature suggests such actors typically include women's groups, religious civil society groups, community organizations, etc.

2.2.1 Women's Groups: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of Women's Groups.

2.2.2 Religious Civil Society: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of Religious Civil Society.

2.2.3 Other Sources: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position or version of Other Sources (LGBT groups, community associations, etc.).

3. Prominence: This refers to the placement of an actor's positions, versions, or actions within a news story. The placement is coded as *prominent* when the position, version, or action of the actor is found in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and or lede. Furthermore, this coding captures prominence by voice type.

3.1 Elite Prominence: This refers to a news story where elite voices' positions, versions, or actions appear in prominent positions in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede. Elite sources are further coded by type.

3.1.1 Religious Organizations: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of churches and/or their clergy in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.1.2 Religious Political: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of religious political parties, their representatives, and/or high-level members (secretary-general, legislators, etc.) in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.1.3 Government: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of the Government, whether as a unit (the Executive branch) or a representative (President, Ministry of Health officials, etc.) in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.1.4 Other: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of the other elite actors listed above (international organizations, legislators, medical experts, etc.) in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.2 Nonelite Prominence: This refers to a news story where nonelite voices' positions, versions, or actions appear in prominent positions in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede. Nonelite sources are further coded by type.

3.2.1 Women's Groups: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of Women's Groups in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.2.2 Religious Civil Society: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of Religious Civil Society in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.2.3 Other Sources: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the position, version, or action of Other Sources in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.3 Mixed Prominence: This refers to whether the headline, sub-headline (when present), and lede of a news story that quotes or mentions the positions, versions, or actions of both elite and nonelite voices in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede. The headline, sub-headline (when present), and lede are further coded according to the position they reveal about the technical norm.

3.3.1 Different Positions: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the positions, versions, or actions of elite and nonelite voices with positions both in favor and against the protocol in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.3.2 In Favor: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the positions, versions, or actions of elite and nonelite voices with positions in favor of the protocol in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.3.3 Against: This refers to a news story that quotes or mentions the positions, versions, or actions of elite and nonelite voices with positions against the protocol in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede.

3.4 Prominence Leaning: This refers to whether the headline, sub-headline (when present), and lede of a news story communicate positions, versions, or actions favorable, negative, mixed, or unclear/neutral to the protocol.

3.4.1 Headline: This refers to whether the headline of a news story communicates positions, versions, or actions favorable, negative, mixed, or unclear/neutral to the protocol.

3.4.2 Sub-Headline: This refers to whether the sub-headline of a news story communicates positions, versions, or actions favorable, negative, mixed, or unclear/neutral to the protocol.

3.4.3 Lede: This refers to whether the lede of a news story communicates positions, versions, or actions favorable, negative, mixed, or unclear/neutral to the protocol.

4. Outlet Type: This refers to whether a news story was published on a legacy or emerging news outlet. Each story was further coded according to whether the news outlet's newsroom is headed by a female or male director.

4.1 Legacy: This refers to whether a news story published in one of the three legacy news outlets selected for this study.

4.1.1 Legacy Female: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet with a newsroom headed by a female director.

4.1.2 Legacy Male: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet with a newsroom headed by a male director.

4.2 Emerging: This refers to whether a news story published in one of the three emerging news outlets selected for this study.

4.2.1 Emerging Female: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet with a newsroom headed by a female director.

4.2.2 Emerging *Male*: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet with a newsroom headed by a male director.

5. Disinformation: This category refers to a news story that repeats disinformation provided by sources. It is coded according to whether the disinformation was identified (Identified) or not (Unidentified) as such in the story and the type of outlet that published it (Legacy or Emerging), the nature of the source that provided it (Religious or Non-Religious), and the placement (Prominent or Not Prominent). For coding purposes, disinformation is understood as information about the therapeutical abortion protocol that has been identified as false or misleading by a Costa Rican fact-checking or news outlet or that is unverifiable (e.g., "God is against abortion"). A review of fact-checking or other news outlets helped identify the existence of nine units of disinformation (Arias, 2019; Artavia, 2020; Bolaños, 2020; Bolaños, 2019; Fonseca, 2019).

Table 1. Units of Disinformation

1. *Unnecessary*: The protocol is unnecessary because it is always possible to save the two lives.
2. *Immortal women*: Women can't die because of pregnancies.
3. *Loophole*: The protocol opens new "loopholes" for free abortion.
4. *Legal abortion*: Conflating therapeutical abortion protocol with free abortion.
5. *Clinics*: There are plans in motion to open abortion clinics.

6. *Illegal*: The protocol is unconstitutional or violates the principle of "reserva de ley" (in civil law systems, this principle states that the legislature can only regulate certain matters).
7. *Religious belief*: Misrepresentation of religious belief as fact (ex. God says abortion is a crime).
8. *Death penalty*: The protocol enables a type of execution or death sentence.
9. *Public support*: The majority of the population opposes therapeutical abortion.

Source: Review of Costa Rican fact-checking or news outlets' stories about disinformation related to the technical norm for therapeutical abortion.

5.1 Disinformation: This refers to a news story that contains disinformation understood as the presence of one or more of the units of disinformation listed in the table above. The news story is coded according to whether the story identifies the disinformation as such or not, the type of news outlet, the source that provided it, and its prominence.

5.1.1 Identified: This refers to a news story that repeats disinformation about the therapeutical abortion protocol and identifies it as false or misleading, or provides sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.1.1.1 Identified Non-Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by non-religious sources and identifies it as such.

5.1.1.2 Identified Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and identifies it as such.

5.1.1.3 Identified Non-Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats

disinformation provided by non-religious sources and identifies it as such.

5.1.1.4 Identified Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and identifies it as such.

5.1.2 Unidentified: This refers to a news story that repeats disinformation about the therapeutical abortion protocol and fails to identify it as false or misleading, or to provide sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.1.2.1 Unidentified Non-Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by non-religious sources and fails to identify it as such or to provide sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.1.2.2 Unidentified Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and fails to identify it as such or to provide sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.1.2.3 Unidentified Non-Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by non-religious sources and fails to identify it as such or to provide sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.1.2.4 Unidentified Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and fails to identify it as such or to provide sufficient information for news consumers to do so.

5.2 Prominence: This refers to whether a news story that contains disinformation - whether it identifies it as such or not - places it the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lead.

5.2.1 Prominent Non-Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by non-religious sources and places it in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lead.

5.2.2 Prominent Religious Legacy: This refers to a news story published in a legacy news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and places it in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lead.

5.2.3 Prominent Non-Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by non-religious sources and places it in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lead.

5.2.4 Prominent Religious Emerging: This refers to a news story published in an emerging news outlet that repeats disinformation provided by religious sources and places it in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lead.

5.3 Abortion Generalization: This refers to whether a news story's headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede use the word "abortion" in reference to "therapeutical abortion" without clarifying the distinction between the two.

5.3.1 Yes: This refers to a news story about "therapeutical abortion" that uses the word "abortion" in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede without clarifying the distinction between the two.

5.3.2 No: This refers to a news story about "therapeutical abortion" that does not use the term "abortion" in the headline, sub-headline (when present), and/or lede, or that clarifies the distinction between the two in the same part of space.

Table 2. Coding Categories

1. Inclusion and Exclusion
1.1 Inclusion:
1.1.1 Yes
1.1.2 No
1.1.3 Inclusion Type:
1.1.3.1 Government
1.1.3.2 Religious Groups
1.1.3.3 Women’s Groups
1.2 Exclusion
1.2.1 Women’s Groups
1.2.2 Religious Groups
1.2.3 Government
1.2.4 One Source (Government)
1.2.5 One Source (Religious Groups)
1.2.6 One Source (Women's Groups)
1.2.7 One Source (Other Sources)
1.3 Other Sources
1.3.1 In Favor
1.3.2 Against
1.3.3 Both
1.3.4 Neutral/Unclear
1.3.5 Other Type

2. Voice Type
2.1 Elite
2.1.1 Religious organizations
2.1.2 Political Secular
2.1.3 Political Religious
2.1.4 Professional Associations
2.1.5 Business
2.1.6 Other
2.2 Nonelite
2.2.1 Women's Groups
2.2.2 Religious Civil Society
2.2.3 Other Sources
3. Prominence
3.1 Elite Prominence
3.1.1 Religious Organizations
3.1.2 Religious Political
3.1.3 Government
3.1.4 Other
3.2 Nonelite Prominence
3.2.1 Women's Groups
3.2.2 Religious Civil Society
3.2.3 Other Sources
3.3 Mixed Prominence
3.3.1 Different Positions
3.3.2 In Favor
3.3.3 Against
3.4 Prominence Leaning
3.4.1 Headline
3.4.2 Sub-Headline
3.4.3 Lede
4. Outlet Type
4.1 Legacy
4.1.1 Legacy Female
4.1.2 Legacy Male
4.2 Emerging
4.2.1 Emerging Female
4.2.2 Emerging Male
5. Disinformation
5.1 Disinformation
5.1.1 Identified
5.1.1.1 Identified Non-Religious Legacy
5.1.1.2 Identified Religious Legacy
5.1.1.3 Identified Non-Religious Emerging
5.1.1.4 Identified Religious Emerging

5.1.2 Unidentified
5.1.2.1 Unidentified Non-Religious Legacy
5.1.2.2 Unidentified Religious Legacy
5.1.2.3 Unidentified Non-Religious Emerging
5.1.2.4 Unidentified Religious Emerging
5.2 Prominence
5.2.1 Prominent Non-Religious Legacy
5.2.2 Prominent Religious Legacy
5.2.3 Prominent Non-Religious Emerging
5.2.4 Prominent Religious Emerging
5.3 Abortion Generalization
5.3.1 Yes
5.3.2 No

Section 3: Coding Procedure

Once the dataset was collected and cleaned, a Spanish-speaking coder was trained and familiarized with the codebook. Three rounds of test-coding were conducted by the coder and the author using a small number of news stories (10 in total between the two) to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Each round generated a few modifications to the codebook, mainly to the coding subcategories available and the language describing the codes.

Once the final version of the codebook was set, about 10% of the sample (50 news stories in total, or 25 each) was coded to test for intercoder reliability to ensure minimum standards were met (70% or higher is generally considered an acceptable level of agreement between coders). A Cohen's Kappa analysis was conducted on the responses provided by both coders, and the result of the Kappa Measurement of Agreement showed the coding reached acceptable reliability (k=0.746, p=.000) since k values above .7 are considered to represent "good agreement" (Pallant, 2016).

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.746	.015	46.440	.000
N of Valid Cases		1100			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

Figure 1. Intercoder Reliability

Next, the full sample was coded. News stories were organized by date (in chronological order) in the database and were divided between the two coders according to the stories' ID numbers. Odd-numbered stories were assigned to one coder and even-numbered to the other coder. Given the study's categorical variables and research questions, the Chi-Square test of relatedness or independence was employed to explore relationships between the categorical variables. For descriptive statistics, frequencies were calculated. Results are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Results: Religion Coverage and Disinformation

Section 1: Religion News and the Spread of Disinformation

The phenomenon of disinformation has affected Latin America as much as it has affected countries in other regions of the 21st Century world. Disinformation has been a determinant factor in the course of political elections and has contributed to polarizing the population along the lines of topics traditionally used by populist leaders to leverage public support. Topics vary in form and strength from one country to another but generally involve long-existing tensions around gender, race, immigration, and the role of the church in government and society, as described in Chapter 2.

Historically, Latin American religious actors have aligned with conservative political groups and actively used the pulpit and other means of communication to strengthen their political agenda. With the emergence of social media and digital news, many religious groups have also joined the ranks of those who spread disinformation, so a question emerges about the extent to which the news media may be amplifying religious disinformation by including it in news stories. Similar questions emerge about the extent to which news media place religious disinformation in prominent points of the publications and whether they fact-check it before disseminating it.

This issue was explored with the following two research questions:

RQ1: *To what extent do fact-based news media repeat false information promoted by elite religious voices without identifying it as such?*

RQ2: *To what extent do fact-based news media make false information provided by elite religious voices prominent?*

As detailed in Chapter 5, a coding scheme was created to do a quantitative analysis of the news stories published within the period of study, and the structure was used to guide the qualitative portion of this work. The section of the coding dedicated to false information analyzed nine units of disinformation displayed in Table 1 (Chapter 5).

The data show that 40 percent of the news stories published during the period of study included disinformation, which in the coding is considered as the presence of at least one of the nine types of disinformation identified in the coding scheme.

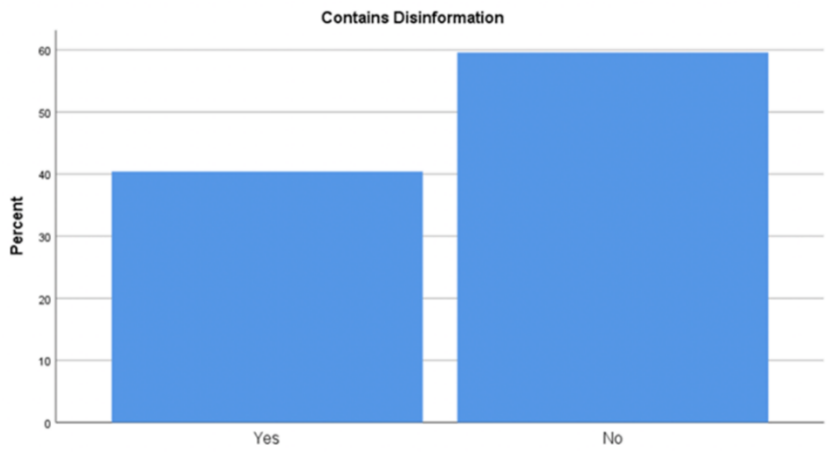

Figure 2. Disinformation in the News

Not all false information identified in the sample can be considered religious, as the data show it was provided to the media by both non-religious and religious

sources. However, the volume of religious disinformation doubled that of non-religious disinformation (66.5 percent to 33.5 percent).

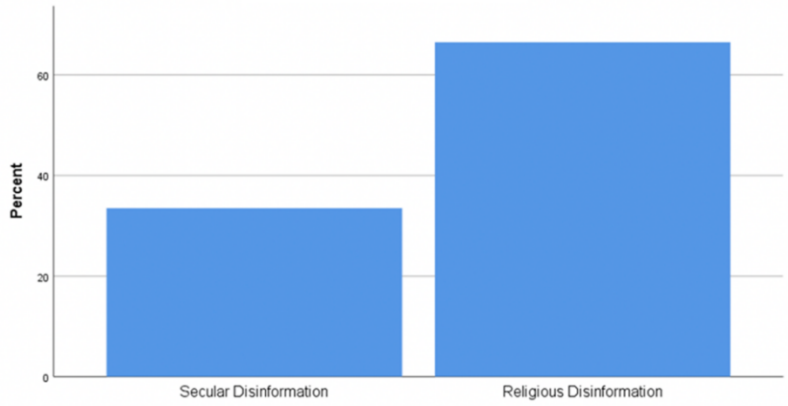

Figure 3. Religious Disinformation

In fact, the quantitative analysis shows a significant correlation between news stories in which religious actors were the only actors consulted or cited by the journalists and the inclusion of disinformation in the respective news stories.

			Does the story include disinformation?		
			1	2	Total
Were RGs the only source?	1	Count	51	28	79
		Expected Count	31.4	47.6	79.0
	2	Count	140	261	401
		Expected Count	159.6	241.4	401.0
Total		Count	191	289	480
		Expected Count	191.0	289.0	480.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.208[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	22.987	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	23.731	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.158	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	480				

Figure 4. Correlation: Religious Sources and Disinformation

Furthermore, even though some of the disinformation was provided by individuals acting in official positions rather than as representatives of religious groups or churches, the qualitative analysis shows that in many cases arguments were voiced by individuals known for their deeply religious views. In this respect, the quantitative distinctions may not entirely capture the full extent of the presence of religious influence in the false information flows in the sample.

An example of this type of coverage is an article by digital news outlet *El Mundo* in which a seemingly Catholic neo-integralist former secretary-general of one

of the main political parties is cited echoing disinformation about the alleged illegality of the protocol. Catholic neo-integralism refers to the resurgence of a movement that seeks to re-found society on the basis of original Catholic principles and beliefs through the use of seemingly legal and scientific arguments (Arguedas, 2020).

"El exsecretario general del Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN), Fernando Zamora, aseguró que la norma técnica es 'un delito presidencial' y que 'si el presidente de la República, Carlos Alvarado, y su ministro de Salud, Daniel Salas, insisten en imponer este tipo de práctica vía decreto incurrirían en prevaricación.' Aunado a esto, Zamora alegó que en ese caso, "la Fiscalía General tendría que procesarlos penalmente a ambos junto con quien pretenda practicar un aborto alegando causas que no son medico quirúrgicas" (Martínez Roque, 2019).

"The former secretary-general of National Liberation Party (PLN), Fernando Zamora, said the protocol is a 'presidential crime' and 'if the president of the Republic, Carlos Alvarado, and his health minister, Daniel Salas, insist on imposing this type of practice via decree they would commit prevarication[1].' Additionally, Zamora added that in that case, the Prosecutor's Office would have to criminally process both of them along with anyone who attempts to practice an abortion alleging non-medical reasons" (Martínez Roque, 2019).

The source tried to explicitly distance himself from being labeled as religious by adding, "*el aborto es mucho más que un tema religioso, la vida es un valor ajeno al capricho del ser humano.*" In English, "abortion is much more than a religious topic, life is a value beyond human whims."

In another story, the newspaper *Diario Extra* dedicates an article to statements by a well-known local singer and journalist who, while not a religious figure himself, is a common presence in religious media circles. The article describes a video the singer published on his social media in which he says there is no difference between a

[1] The word "prevaricato" is often translated to English as "prevaricate" but because of differences in the jurisdictional legal frameworks its meaning is more accurately described as "knowingly issuing an unfair decision," in this case by the Executive branch rather than the Judiciary (Jowers, 2016).

woman who burns her children alive - a woman had recently been convicted for setting up a fire that killed her children - and a woman who has an abortion. He then links the killing of children with the therapeutical abortion protocol.

"'Sobre la sentencia a 60 años a la que se ha denominado la hiena de Costa Rica. Una mujer asesina, una mujer sin escrúpulos, la gente le dice que es una perra en redes sociales, pero eso sería ofender a las perras. Ya se demostró que no tiene ningún problema psicológico, incluso se sabe que es una profesional, que es licenciada en administración de empresas.

La forma en la que ella mata a sus hijos es tan déspota, que he escuchado a todo el mundo diciendo que qué barbaridad, que debería haber pena de muerte y yo les pregunto a ustedes, amigos, ¿qué diferencia hay en lo que hizo esta hiena a una persona que decide abortar? No hay ninguna', expresó.

Barboza agregó que la norma terapéutica es engañosa. 'La única diferencia es que los hijos de ella tenían 8 y 10 años y cuando una persona aborta lo hace con un niño de escasos meses de gestación, pero que no me vengan con el cuento de que no son seres humanos porque está comprobado por la Organización Mundial de la Salud y que hay parte científica que sí hay vida.

La norma terapéutica que quiere firmar el Señor Carlos Alvarado y la cual nosotros estamos organizando marchas y estamos en contra, es porque no me vengan con el cuento de que ya existe en Costa Rica y que nada más se va a regular, lo que existe es cuando la madre en realidad está en peligro de muerte que pueda abortar', agregó.

Para el comunicador, las excusas sobran. "Ahora es muy fácil 'quiero abortar porque no quiero el niño', 'porque estoy deprimida', 'porque es síndrome de down', 'porque no tengo las condiciones económicas para tenerlo', eso se convierte en un asesinato, entonces no tiene absolutamente nada ninguna diferencia con la mujer que mató a sus dos hijos', finalizó" (Morales, 2019).

"'Regarding the 60-year sentence against the so-called hyena of Costa Rica[2]. An assassin woman, a woman without scruples, people in social media call her a dog, but that would be offensive to dogs. It has been demonstrated that she does not suffer any psychological problems, she is even a professional, with a degree in business management.

[2] The translation reflects the grammar inconsistencies of the original, which relate to the oral nature of the source's statements and also to poor punctuation by the reporter who transcribed them.

She killed her children like a despot and I hear everybody saying that is barbaric, that we should have the death penalty, but I ask you, friends, what difference is there between what this hyena did and a person who decides to have an abortion? There is none,' he said.

Barboza added that the protocol is misleading. 'The only difference is that her children were 8 and 10 and when a person has an abortion they do it with a child who is just a few months old, and do not bring to me those stories that they are not human beings because it is has been demonstrated by the World Health Organization and scientific evidence that there is life.

The protocol that Mr. Carlos Alvarado wants to sign and we oppose and are organizing protests against, is because we do not buy the story that it already exists in Costa Rica and this is only going to regulate it, what already exists is when the mother's life is really in danger so she can abort,' he added."

For the communicator, excuses abound. 'Now it is very easy, 'I want an abortion because I don't want the child,' 'because I am depressed,' 'because down syndrome,' 'because I don't have the economic conditions to have it,' that becomes an assassination, so there is absolutely no difference with the woman who killed her two children,' he concluded" *(Morales, 2019).*

As can be seen in the statements, the source uses the pronoun "we" to refer to opposition to the protocol and the organization of protests against it, even though he is not a representative or spokesperson of any specific group.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses are described next regarding the 40 percent of the news stories that contained false information regarding disinformation types, identification or non-identification of false information, and prominence. The remaining 60 percent of the sample is not discussed in this chapter since it did not contain false information.

Section 2: Types of False Information

As the graphic below shows, the quantitative analysis found that all nine types of disinformation were present in the news stories, but some types were included and amplified by the news media to a much higher extent than others.

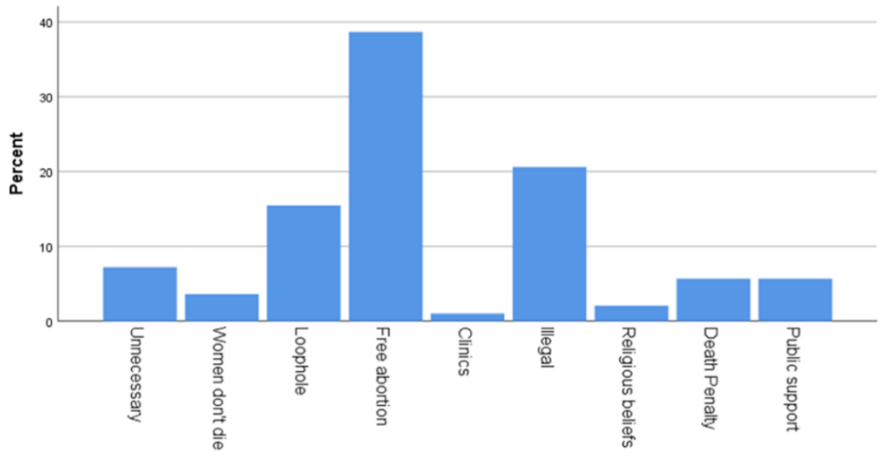

Figure 5. Popular Types of Disinformation

The type of false information that was repeated the most (in almost 40 percent of the cases) refers to portrayals of abortion to save the life or health of the pregnant woman as equivalent to the decriminalization of abortion in all cases. As discussed in previous chapters, this is misleading because the former is a very restricted form of abortion and the latter is neither allowed in law nor under discussion in Congress for

possible decriminalization. Conflating both types of abortion can generate the perception among the public that abortion decriminalization is at stake or is imminent unless citizens who oppose it help fight it, through actions such as participating in protests, voting for political parties that oppose "abortion," exercising pressure on their representatives, expressing opposition to all forms of abortion on social media, etc.

The lede and following two paragraphs of an article by digital news outlet *CRHoy* demonstrate how this is done.

"La Iglesia Católica anunció la campaña '40 días por la vida,' con la que pretenden que el aborto nunca sea legalizado en el país.

Esta iniciativa aboga a los fieles católicos a hacer 'oración, ayuno, vigilias y diferentes autoridades comunitarias para convertirnos en verdaderos promotores de la Cultura de la Vida en nuestro país, tan asediado en los últimos años por ideologías foráneas que atentan contra la dignidad de la vida humana,' dice la carta firmada por los obispos.

En el documento, instan al Presidente de la República, Carlos Alvarado a 'no firmar la norma técnica. Bien vale la pena defender a quienes todavía no tienen voz para clamar por su vida" (Quesada, 2019).

"The Catholic Church announced the '40 days for life" campaign, with which it intends abortion is never legalized in the country.

The initiative invites Catholics to use "prayers, fasting, vigils, and different community authorities (*sic*) to become true promoters of a 'Culture of Life' in our country, so besieged in recent years by foreign ideologies that threaten the dignity of human life,' says the letter signed by the bishops.

In the document, they encourage the President of the Republic, Carlos Alvarado, 'not to sign the protocol. It is well worth it to defend those who do not yet have a voice to claim for their lives" (Quesada, 2019).

As can be observed, the lede describes the campaign as a measure against the decriminalization of abortion in the country – even though the possibility of

decriminalizing it is not being discussed in the country. Then, in its third paragraph, the article quotes the bishops' request that the President refrains from signing the "protocol," as if the protocol had any relation to the topic of abortion decriminalization. Neither the article nor the bishops in their letter clarify the distinction between the two topics.

In a few cases, it is the authors of the news stories rather than the sources who introduce this type of disinformation by conflating the two types of abortion. For instance, the following article from newspaper *La República* reports on a pro-choice march with a headline that says the march is for "legal, safe, and cost-free abortion" and the lede says the march is to demand the immediate issuance of the therapeutical abortion protocol.

Headline: ***"46 organizaciones exigirán al Gobierno aborto legal, seguro y gratuito***

Lede: Unas 46 organizaciones se unieron en un movimiento para exigir la firma inmediata de la norma técnica de aborto impune. Para demandar esto se convoca a una concentración el miércoles 8 de agosto a las 4 p.m. frente a la Casa Presidencial" (Barquero, 2018).

Headline: **"46 organizations will ask the government for legal, safe and cost-free abortion**

Lede: About 46 organizations joined in a movement to demand the immediate issuance of the protocol for therapeutical abortion. To demand it, they are convoking a demonstration Wednesday, Aug. 8th at 4 p.m. outside the Presidential House" (Barquero, 2018).

The march organizers did indeed express their position in favor of both the protocol in the immediate term and the decriminalization of abortion in the future. However, the article cited above - and a few others - conflated the two demands and

failed to explain the difference between them, which a regular reader could understandably interpret as confirmation of anti-choice groups' misleading or false claims that the protocol is associated with the decriminalization of abortion in the country.

The second type of disinformation that stands out refers to the alleged illegality of the protocol (whether because of the provisions included in it or because of the process that preceded its enactment), which was present in 20 percent of the news stories. The 1970 law that legalized abortion to save the pregnant person's life or health explicitly tasked the Executive with creating a protocol to operationalize its implementation. However, anti-choice groups falsely claim that only Congress could issue the protocol and that the Executive was acting illegally by doing so. This argument served as the base for several legal actions filed against the Executive, all of which were rejected by the courts but allowed opponents to stay in the news cycle as challenging the Executive's "illegal" actions. This tactic also allowed them to slow down the process to issue the protocol and, therefore, lengthen their window of opportunity to influence the content of the protocol or its issuance altogether.

The following is an example of an article by newspaper *La República* that repeats this type of disinformation in the coverage of a press release by a self-denominated "pro-life" congressional block, integrated mostly by members of religious political parties and joined by a small number of legislators from non-religious parties.

"Para los legisladores regular el aborto terapéutico por medio de un decreto, sería una ilegalidad. 'Se trata de un irrespeto total a la división de poderes, ya que la mal llamada norma busca regular vía reglamento una ley penal, algo que solo los legisladores pueden hacer según lo establece el artículo 39 de la Constitución

Política. Esta pretensión es absurda, porque no se puede modificar un delito tipificado en la ley ordinaria, vía decreto ejecutivo,' indica un comunicado enviado por el grupo parlamentario" (Arrieta, 2019).

"For the legislators, regulating therapeutical abortion through a decree would be illegal. 'It is a total disrespect to the division of powers because the so-called protocol seeks to regulate via a decree a criminal law, something that only legislators can do according to article 39 of the Political Constitution. This is an absurd pretense because it is not possible to modify a crime as defined by the criminal code via executive decree,' according to a press release issued by the legislative group" *(Arrieta, 2019).*

The article does explain that the law allows for therapeutical abortion and a protocol is necessary to successfully implement that law, but it does not fact-check the claims made by the legislators. It simply repeats past statements by government representatives who have said the protocol's draft is close to completion. The article does not seek the opinions of legal experts, government representatives, or pro-choice groups who could have explained why the legislators' arguments are bogus.

Even after the protocol was issued and anti-choice groups failed to obtain any judiciary rulings confirming their claims that the protocol was illegal unless approved by the Legislative, religious groups continued to spread disinformation about the alleged illegality. Newspaper *La Nación* cited Catholic Church bishops echoing this claim in the following article.

"Las autoridades religiosas, además, insisten en que la norma técnica debe someterse 'a la aprobación legislativa', aunque no se trata de una nueva ley, pues la figura del llamado aborto impune está en el Código Penal desde 1970" (Córdoba González, 2019).

"Furthermore, religious authorities insist that the protocol should go through 'legislative approval,' even though it is not a new law because the so-called therapeutical abortion is in the Criminal Code since 1970 (Córdoba González, 2019).

Disinformation about legal aspects of abortion to save a woman's life or health in some cases went beyond the process that was taking place within the country and included inaccurate references to relevant, international frameworks as well. For instance, when a pro-choice congresswoman made a reference to the fact that the United Nations Human Rights Committee considers abortion as a human right, a news article reported inaccurate statements by a religious party congressman.

"El diputado Jonathan Prendas, expresó que en el movimiento Nueva República son defensores de la vida. Prendas respondió de esta manera a la legisladora oficialista Paola Vega, quien en un conversatorio en Ulacit manifestó que el aborto es un derecho humano.

'Se equivoca profundamente la diputada Paola Vega en su discurso en favor del aborto, pues refleja un total desconocimiento de nuestro ordenamiento jurídico,' agregó el congresista. Actualmente, la interrupción terapéutica del embarazo está incluida como aborto no punible en el artículo 121 del Código Penal.

El mismo establece que el aborto no es punible 'si se ha hecho con el fin de evitar un peligro para la vida o la salud de la madre y éste no ha podido ser evitado por otros medios.'

'La vida y la salud son derechos humanos fundamentales que debemos resguardar y en 'Nueva República' nos aseguremos de defenderla en todas las instancias necesarias. Podemos y debemos atender integralmente a la madre y al no nacido,' concluyó el coordinador de los 7 diputados independientes'" (Pérez González, 2018).

"Congressman Jonathan Prendas said that in the New Republic movement they defend life. Prendas responded that way to ruling party congresswoman Paola Vega, who in a panel in Ulacit said abortion is a human right.

'Congresswoman Paola Vega is deeply mistaken in her pro-abortion discourse, which reflects total ignorance of our legal framework,' the congressman added. Currently, therapeutic termination of a pregnancy is considered as not publishable abortion in article 121 of the Criminal Code.

The Code establishes that abortion is not punishable 'if it has been done with the objective of avoiding danger to the life or health of the mother and such danger could not be avoided through other means.'

'Life and health are fundamental human rights we must protect and in Nueva República we will be sure to defend them in all necessary circumstances. We can and must integrally tend to both the mother and the unborn,' said the coordinator of the seven independent legislators" (Pérez González, 2018).

As can be seen in the text above, the congressman uses references to the national legal framework to portray the congresswoman's comments as ignorant, even though she was referring to the international recognition of the right. The reporter does not make the distinction clear anywhere in the news article.

The third type of false information (present in 15 percent of the news stories) refers to the idea that the protocol contains loopholes any person can leverage to get an abortion without really meeting the legal requirements to be eligible for one. Such statements started to spread before the protocol's provisions were even drafted and they seemed designed to inspire distrust so that even if some individuals realized that abortion decriminalization was not at stake and that the process had followed the law, they could still perceive a reason to support the actions against it.

"Los 14 diputados del Partido Restauración Nacional (PRN) presentaron en conferencia de prensa el día de hoy a la Asamblea Legislativa un documento que titularon Manifiesto Público por la Defensa de la Vida.

En el texto acusan a los diputados oficialistas y a 'sus aliados monotemáticos' así como a la ministra de la Condición de la Mujer, Patricia Mora, de insistir en 'impulsar y aprobar el aborto en Costa Rica' (sí, la cita es textual).

En el documento los restauradores expresan a la opinión pública su compromiso con 'defender la vida desde la concepción', y su 'oposición absoluta y categórica a la figura del aborto' incluyendo cualquier medida que 'disfrace' el aborto común como aborto terapéutico. También manifiestan su rechazo a 'argumentos falaces para introducir el aborto en Costa Rica' como el tema de la 'supuesta protección de la salud de la madre, cuando se descuidan temas tan elementales como la violencia obstétrica'.

Así mismo los diputados del PRN aseguran que utilizarán todos los mecanismos legislativos para impedir 'cualquier iniciativa pro-abortista', así como

todos los instrumentos legales disponibles para impedir 'abrir portillos' para el aborto vía decreto ejecutivo" (May Grosser, 2018).

"The 14 legislators of the National Restoration Party (PRN) today announced in a press conference in Congress a document they entitled Public Manifest for the Defense of Life.

In the text, they accuse the ruling party legislators and their 'monothematic allies' and Minister for the Women Wellbeing, Patricia Mora, of insisting on 'promoting and approving abortion in Costa Rica (yes, this is a textual quote).

In the document, the restorationists express to the public opinion their commitment to 'defending life from conception' and their 'absolute and categorical opposition to abortion, including any measure that 'disguises' regular abortion as therapeutical abortion. They also expressed their rejection of 'fallacious arguments to introduce abortion in Costa Rica' under the guise of 'alleged protection to the health of the mother, when things as elemental as obstetric violence go unattended.'

The PRN legislators also said they will use all legislative mechanisms to stop 'any pro-abortion initiative' and all legal instruments at their disposal to prevent the 'opening of loopholes' for abortion via executive decree" (May grosser, 2018).

The article by digital news outlet *Delfino* extensively quotes anti-choice legislators as they attempt to portray the protocol as equivalent to decriminalizing abortion. Because they are unable to point to specific portions of the protocol to back their claims, instead they label the very idea of abortion to save the life or health of the woman as "fallacious."

The article does not explicitly identify their claims as disinformation or quote other sources providing the opposite point of view. However, the line "yes, this is a textual quote" - in parenthesis after the quote in which the legislators equate the protocol with approving regular abortion - can be understood in the local context as signaling that the news outlet is not vouching for its accuracy and/or as an assumption that the readers will understand the claim is not to be taken seriously.

In a different article, the same news outlet references claims that the protocol is a loophole for regular abortion in a different way, not by quoting the anti-choice voices but rather the Minister of Health as he dispels the disinformation.

Otro tema que también se trató este martes y que los personeros de Salud señalaron, reiteradamente, es que, la norma no es un portillo para el aborto libre en el país pues no amplía en nada lo que dispone el artículo 121 del Código Penal. El jerarca Daniel Salas señaló que:

'Esta norma no es una norma que abre portillos al aborto libre. No lo es, es una norma que lo que busca es proteger la salud o la vida de las mujeres que por su situación de embarazo o ante una patología de fondo, tienen un peligro inminente ante esas condiciones: su salud o su vida. Cuando se hayan agotado todas las posibilidades médicas para evitar llegar a ese punto, se podrá considerar la interrupción del embarazo'" (Mora, 2019).

"Another issue discussed on Tuesday and that Health representatives reiterated is that the protocol is not a loophole for regular abortion in the country because it does not in any way expand what article 121 of the Criminal Code says. Minister Daniel Salas said:

'This is not a protocol that opens loopholes for regular abortion. It is not. It is a protocol that seeks to protect the health or life of women who because of their pregnancy or underlying pathologies face imminent danger in those conditions: their health or their life. When all medical possibilities have been exhausted to avoid getting to that point, then pregnancy termination can be considered'" (Mora, 2019).

The fourth type of disinformation (close to 10 percent of the news stories) refers to the idea that nowadays it is always possible for science to "save the two lives" and therefore therapeutical abortion is no longer necessary. That argument is false. Furthermore, it focuses solely on the risk to life as if that was the only reason legally allowed for a terminating a dangerous pregnancy, when in fact the law also grants that right to it in cases of health risk.

The following segment of a news article by newspaper *La Nación* shows the extent of the disinformation religious political parties promoted.

"El diputado Jonathan Prendas, vocero del bloque independiente Nueva República, aseguró este lunes, en conferencia de prensa, que 'no hay enfermedad provocada por el embarazo que demande la muerte de la madre'.

El congresista hizo dicha afirmación durante una conferencia de prensa con legisladores de otros partidos en la que presentó un proyecto para proteger la 'vida del no nacido' desde el momento de la concepción, mediante una reforma al Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia.

Prendas atribuyó dicha opinión al presidente del Colegio de Médicos, con quien compartió un foro pocas horas antes y en donde se firmó un pronunciamiento en el mismo sentido de la defensa 'del niño o niña por nacer'.

El congresista, quien se separó de Restauración Nacional hace tres meses, aumentó sus declaraciones al decir que 'no hay padecimientos producto del embarazo que pongan en riesgo la vida de la mujer'.

'Cualquier otro padecimiento, sea de cardiología, cáncer, insuficiencia renal, se atiende de forma paralela y no hay ningún problema', manifestó Prendas, periodista y politólogo" (Sequeira, 2019).

"Congressman Jonathan Prendas, a spokesman of the New Republic independent block, said Monday in a press conference that 'there is no illness caused by pregnancy that leads to the death of the mother.'

The legislator made the statement during a press conference with colleagues from other parties in which he introduced a bill to protect 'unborn life' from the moment of conception by reforming the Childhood and Adolescence Code.

Prendas attributed his opinion to the president of the Colegio de Médicos[3], with whom he shared a panel a few hours before and in which they signed a statement in defense of the 'unborn boy or girl.'

The legislator, who became independent after leaving National Restoration three months ago, upped his statements by saying that 'there are no illnesses produced by pregnancy that represent a risk to the life of a woman.'

'Any other illness, whether related to cardiology, cancer, renal insufficiency, can be treated in parallel without any problem,' said Prendas, a journalist and political scientist" (Sequeira, 2019).

[3] This could be translated as Medical Board. It is a medical board led by medical professionals and is in charge of licensing who can exercise the profession. It also handles disciplinary complaints.

As can be seen, the story dedicates its first few paragraphs to reporting on the disinformation promoted by the legislator. Then, the article extensively quotes reputable medical professionals explaining why it is false to say that pregnancies do not cause dangerous illnesses or that all underlying health conditions can be treated in parallel with pregnancy. However, only readers who would go past the first few paragraphs would be exposed to the medical experts and the facts.

It is also noticeable that the story mentions the introduction of the bill to protect 'unborn life' from the moment of conception but it fails to explicitly say the bill seeks to prohibit terminating a pregnancy even if means ending the woman's life or damaging her health. Toward the end, the article notes the bill proposes to "prohibit all procedures or techniques that affect or stop (a fetus) normal development and growth" and grants the unborn "special protection...higher than any other person's," but does not spell out that the consequence of such as measure is to let women die or suffer health damage.

The qualitative review of the stories in the sample shows that these four main types of false information were not only promoted with frequency but also throughout the entire period of study, while the most shocking or dramatic ones were used to a lesser extent and mostly during certain points of the process - perhaps when they were needed to reenergize the opposition to the protocol - and were retired soon after. Examples of the latter include conflating abortion to save the life and/or health of the pregnant woman with legalizing the death penalty in the country, denying that pregnancies can put women's lives at risk, or alleging that abortion clinics were already in process of opening in the country.

For instance, when the protocol was finally issued, anti-choice figures said the death penalty had been officially reinstated in the country, without dropping the other more common types of disinformation used. Digital news outlet *El Mundo* published the following statement:

"Según Acuña, 'Costa Rica jamás olvidará. Volvió la pena de muerte.' Y es que la legisladora ha sido vehemente con su discurso y ha alegado constantemente en que la norma es 'ilegal' y además ha señalado que el 'gobierno pretende que por situaciones emocionales, ante un embarazo no planeado, se aplique la excepción del artículo 121 del Código Penal y se ejecute la sentencia de muerte a una persona no nacida' (Martínez Roque, 2019).

"According to (legislator) Acuña, 'Costa Rica will never forget. The death penalty has returned.' The legislator has been passionate in her discourse and constantly claimed that the protocol is 'illegal' and has also said that the 'government pretends that emotional situations involving an unplanned pregnancy allow for the exception established in article 121 of the Criminal Code to execute the death penalty against an unborn person" (Martínez Roque, 2019).

On the same occasion of the protocol signature by the President, Newspaper *Diario Extra* quotes several anti-choice voices advancing the same notion that the decree revives the death penalty.

"El gobierno dirigido por Carlos Alvarado reinstauró la pena de muerte en Costa Rica, así lo manifestaron este viernes representantes del Frente Nacional por la Vida, luego de que el presidente estampara su firma en la norma técnica sobre el aborto.

El Frente Nacional por la Vida agrupa a más de 30 diputados y diversas organizaciones sociales, ellos sostienen que el documento aprobado el jueves en la noche es un adefesio que violenta y desnaturaliza el ordenamiento jurídico.

'Con un zarpazo, esta norma ha reinstaurado la pena de muerte en Costa Rica, hoy disfrazada en derecho a favor de las mujeres', manifestó Shirley Díaz, legisladora de la Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC)" (Jiménez, 2019).

"Carlos Alvarado's government reinstated the death penalty in Costa Rica, said representatives of the National Front for Life on Friday after the president signed a protocol about abortion.

The National Front for Life brings together more than 30 legislators and different organizations who said the document approved Thursday night is a monstrosity that violates and denaturalizes the legal framework.

'By sleight of hand, this protocol has reinstated the death penalty in Costa Rica, today disguised as a right in favor of women,' said Shirley Díaz, a legislator with Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC)" (Jiménez, 2019).

A handful of articles cover anti-choice civil society groups, which also promote different types of disinformation, such as in the example below published by digital news outlet *CRHoy* about a group of people who organizes public praying events against abortion.

"Se trata de la Asociación Pro Vida Costa Rica, quienes harán los rezos todos los días durante ese lapso y harán vigilia frente al Congreso desde las 6:00 a.m. hasta las 6:00 p.m. Esta es la primera vez que a través de grupos, el país se suma a la campaña, la cual se realiza en 52 países.

Priscila Porras, presidenta del grupo afirmó que con esto buscan que se de el inicio del fin del aborto. 'Hacemos un llamado al pueblo de Costa Rica que se siente identificado con la causa para que se unan porque esto es una manifestación totalmente pacífica en defensa de los niños por nacer,' dijo.

Estas actividades se realizan en las afueras de centros abortistas o bien, donde se toman decisiones al respecto" (Ruiz, 2018).

"It's the Costa Rica Pro-Life Association, which will pray every day during that period and will hold vigils in front of Congress from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. This is the first time that through these groups the country is part of the campaign, which takes place in 52 countries.

Priscilla Porras, the group's president, said that with this they seek the beginning of the end of abortion. 'We call the people of Costa Rica who identify with the cause to join us because this is a totally pacific demonstration in defense of the unborn,' she said.

The activities take place outside of abortion centers or where related decisions are made" (Ruiz, 2018).

The disinformation, in this case, is present in the last sentence, where the article says the group organizes prayers outside of "abortion centers," which do not exist in the country. The news article does not clarify that fact.

Overall, disinformation relied more on relatively abstract aspects of the topic that could be confusing to unpack for large segments of the public and less on outrageous claims that could be easier to fact-check or harder for the regular citizen to believe. For example, anti-abortion allies from the medical sector had to publicly rebuke claims by religious politicians who said women cannot die because of pregnancy-related issues. However, they took no issue with the widely used "save the two lives" slogan which, when used as a reason to reject therapeutical abortion, tacitly assumes that it is always possible to save the woman's life.

Section 3: Identification of False Information

This section focuses on the extent to which news stories that contained disinformation identified it as such or failed to do so, and whether religious disinformation was unidentified to a higher extent than non-religious disinformation.

The quantitative analysis shows that the majority (66.5 percent) of news stories that included disinformation failed to identify it as such, leaving it up to news consumers to accept the disinformation as accurate information or do their own verification. Only a minority (33.5 percent) of the stories that repeated disinformation identified it as such.

The articles that included disinformation but failed to identify it as such represent 27 percent of the overall sample, while those that included disinformation and identified it as inaccurate or untruthful represent 13.5 percent of the overall sample.

An example of a news article that includes disinformation and fails to identify it as such or to provide the necessary information for readers to reach their own conclusions is below from newspaper *Diario Extra*, which quotes the organizers of an anti-choice march stating that the protocol allows a person to access abortion by claiming she lacks the economic means to carry it forward.

"'Lo que pasa es que esta norma técnica abre la interpretación de la palabra salud, a la salud psico socioeconómica, es decir una persona que tiene una necesidad económica podría aducir que no está en capacidad de tener a su bebé y podría abortar', expresó Gerald Bogantes, organizador del movimiento.

También, destacó que algunas mujeres podrían aducir problemas psicológicos y emocionales, razones por las cuales tampoco están preparadas para tener al bebé y se les permitiría interrumpir el embarazo" (Jiménez, 2018).

"What happens is that this protocol expands the interpretation of the word health to include psycho socioeconomic health, in other words, a person of poor economic means could allege that she does not have the means to have a baby and could have an abortion,' said Gerald Bogantes, the movement's organizer.

He added that some women could allege psychological and emotional problems as reasons for why they are not prepared to have a baby and they would be allowed to terminate the pregnancy" (Jiménez, 2018).

Both claims - that economic and psychological or emotional problems would be deemed sufficient cause for abortion - are false, but the news article does not indicate so. In fact, at that point of the process, the terms of the protocol draft had not

been made public and the authorities in charge of the process had not made any statements about the contents, so any statements claiming to know the terms of the protocol lacked a factual basis. The march took place outside the Presidential House and the news article includes a response by a spokesperson, but the information attributed to him refers to procedural aspects unrelated to the false claims made by march organizers.

The next example is an article by newspaper *La Nación* which identifies disinformation and shows the journalist explicitly confronting an anti-choice source - a conservative legislator - about the disinformation spread. The article is structured in an interview format and shows the reporter asking for the factual basis of statements made. The reporter's questions are in bold below, as they appeared in the original article.

*"**¿Por qué no debería reglamentarse la norma, si son cada vez menos?***
-Porque lo que sucede es que si la norma técnica se reglamenta, tal como podemos suponer con base en el documento que se redactó con el Ministerio de Salud, el año anterior, se estaría abriendo un portillo muy grande para que se realicen abortos en caso de que la madre se encuentre en peligro.

¿Tienen certeza de que ese es el documento que se va a firmar?
-No tenemos certeza, pero estamos vacunándonos en salud, porque no queremos que, a través de un protocolo y norma técnica que viene a interpretar la ley, suceda un asunto que es prerrogativa del Poder Legislativo, que luego tengamos que entrar en luchas legales innecesarias.

Pero un reglamento no interpreta una ley, la reglamenta.
-El reglamento eso es lo que debe hacer, reglamentar la ley, pero lo que se está haciendo...

¿Entonces por qué están suponiendo que se va a interpretar?
-Es una norma técnica, diay, lo que está interpretando es el artículo, la norma técnica lo que está poniendo es...

¿Una norma técnica no establece paso por paso cómo se realiza un procedimiento, una especie de protocolo?

-Como le repito, yo no tengo el documento, porque nadie lo tiene el documento final. Pero en el anterior ni siquiera se establece cuáles van a ser las enfermedades que van a ser tomadas en cuenta en el caso de la madre. Tampoco se establece el tiempo en que se va a dar el aborto terapéutico, los plazos" (Sequeira, 2019).

"Why should there be no protocol, if there are fewer cases?

-Because if the protocol is issued, we can guess based on a previous draft by the Ministry of Health from last year that it would create a very large loophole for abortion in case the mother is in danger.

Do you have any certainty that the same document will be signed?

-We have no certainty but we are 'getting vaccinated in health' because we want to prevent that, through a protocol that interprets the law, something is decided that should be decided by the Legislative and then we would need to get into unnecessary legal battles.

But a protocol does not interpret a law, it regulates its application.

-That is what a protocol should do, to regulate the application of the law, but what they are doing...

Then why are you guessing they will interpret it?

-It is a protocol, I mean, what it is interpreting is the article, the protocol what is trying to do is...

Does not a protocol establish step by step how to implement a procedure, as a protocol?

-I repeat, I do not have the document because nobody has the final document. But the previous one did not even establish which illnesses can be considered on the mother's side. It does not establish the period for therapeutical abortion, the deadlines" (Sequeira, 2019).

While this article exposes some of the statements the legislator has been making as lacking on a factual basis, it also allows her to add misleading information that is not explicitly clarified. For example, in response to the first question above, the legislator says the protocol can create "a very large loophole for abortion in case the mother is in danger." However, the law exists precisely to allow abortion in case the woman is in danger so by definition that is not a loophole.

Similarly, in response to the last question above, the congresswoman says some previous protocol documentation she read failed to indicate the periods or deadlines in which a pregnancy can be terminated. This does not make sense either because pregnancy can pose danger to the pregnant person at any point in the process and medical intervention cannot be forbidden or limited to predetermined moments of the process.

The quantitative analysis shows that most of the disinformation that went unidentified in the articles was religious (73 percent), which suggests that journalists were less likely to verify religious disinformation before including it in the articles. Regarding the disinformation that was identified as such in the articles, the quantitative analysis reveals that religious and non-religious disinformation was identified as such to generally equal extents: 52 percent for the religious disinformation versus 48 percent for the non-religious disinformation.

The following article focuses on the Catholic Church's reaction to the issuance of the protocol and was published by newspaper *La Nación*.

"*Los obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica expresaron su 'contundente rechazo e indignación' ante la firma, por parte del presidente Carlos Alvardo, de la norma técnica que permite la interrupción del embarazo cuando peligra la salud y la vida de la madre.*

Según ellos, la decisión presidencial contradice el sentimiento expresado 'por un pueblo convencido de su amor a Dios y a la vida naciente'. Incluso, los prelados califican la norma técnica como 'aborto impune'.

Alvarado firmó la noche de este jueves la norma técnica en cumplimiento con el compromiso que asumió 'con la vida y la salud de las mujeres'.

A partir de ayer, la Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social (CCSS) tiene seis meses para cumplir con el contenido del protocolo médico. De ese mismo tiempo

disponen los hospitales privados para implementar los protocolos necesarios y cumplir la cita disposición.

'Siempre nos expresamos en contra de esta y de toda acción que pretenda abrir portillos que atenten contra la vida humana, especialmente, contra la de los más vulnerables como el no nacido pues el Evangelio de la vida está en el centro del mensaje de Jesús'" (Cerdas, 2019).

"The bishops of the Episcopal Conferencia of Costa Rica expressed their 'resolute rejection and indignation' of the signature, by president Carlos Alvarado, of the protocol that allows the interrupting pregnancy when it poses a danger to the life and health of the mother.

According to them, the presidential decision contradicts the sentiment expressed ‘by a population convinced of their love for God and nascent life.' Furthermore, the priests labeled the norm as 'unpunishable abortion.'

Alvarado signed the protocol Thursday night fulfilling a commitment he made 'with women's life and health.'

Starting yesterday, the Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social (CCSS) has six months to comply with the contents of the medical protocol. Private hospitals have the same deadline to implement the necessary measure and comply with said disposition.

'We always speak up against this and any other action that attempts to create loopholes that threaten human life, especially the life of the most vulnerable such as the unborn because the gospel of life is at the center of Jesus' message'" (Cerdas, 2019).

The article is mostly dedicated to the bishops' reaction to the issuance of the protocol and the first few paragraphs repeat several types of disinformation provided by the Catholic Church's representatives. One type of disinformation refers to the notion that the decision contradicts the sentiment of the majority of the population, as several public opinion surveys consistently have shown that the majority support abortion to save women's life and health. The bishops also refer to the protocol as an attempt to "create loopholes," when in fact the protocol neither creates legal

conditions that were not already present in the Costa Rican jurisdiction nor does it provide opportunities for abortion to take place outside of a very restricted set of conditions.

It is also interesting to note that the bishops label the protocol as 'unpunishable abortion,' which is misleading. The protocol helps operationalize how therapeutical abortion is to take place, but it is not the source of that right nor does it make abortion in general 'unpunishable,' as can be understood in the way in which the term was used by the bishops. It should be noted that in Spanish the term "impunity" has a negative connotation and often relates to criminal activity that goes unpunished due to corruption and/or failures of the legal system. Labeling abortion to save a woman's life or health as "*impune*" - an adjective derived from the word "impunity" that does not have a direct translation to English - takes the issue from a human rights frame and into one of reprovable criminal activity. In their statements, the bishops also combine their disinformation with religious belief ("…because the gospel of life is at the center of Jesus' message').

Other news stories repeat religious beliefs advanced by religious leaders and other individuals as if they were facts or information with a factual foundation, in some cases attempting to present their religious perspectives as non-religious. For instance, newspaper *Diario Extra* published the following statements in an article focused on the head of the Catholic Church's views before the protocol was issued.

"'La vida es el derecho fundamental y radical sobre el cual se sustentan todos los demás derechos y por tanto desde la fe, la vida como regalo de Dios. Solamente Él dispone de la vida de cada ser humano y por supuesto que todos estamos llamados

a su defensa de aquellos que ni siquiera pueden llorar, los más indefensos, aquellos que están en el vientre de la madre', dijo Quirós.

El representante de la Iglesia también hizo eco de las manifestaciones del Colegio de Médicos y Cirujanos en relación con el tema, como también lo hizo el papa Francisco. 'Como ya lo ha manifestado el papa Francisco en relación con el aborto, no es algo religioso, sino que es algo eminentemente humano. Ya le hicimos ese llamado al presidente Carlos Alvarado para que no rubrique esa norma', agregó" (González, 2019).

"Life is a fundamental and radical right on which all other rights are based and for that reason, from faith, life is a gift of God. Only Him can dispose of each human being's life and of course we are all called to the defense of those who cannot cry, the most vulnerable, those who are in the womb,' Quirós said.

The Church's representative also echoed statements by the Medical Board about the issue as well as Pope Francis. 'As Pope Francis has said about abortion, this is not something religious, it is eminently human. We have already asked President Carlos Alvarado not to sign that protocol,' he added" (González, 2019).

As can be seen, the article incorporates quotes that present religious beliefs not as opinions or beliefs but as facts, without indicating that these are scientifically unverified beliefs and, as such, cannot serve as the basis of laws imposed on all citizens – and especially not to those who have different religious beliefs or no religious beliefs at all. It is usually assumed that when the news media mention religious beliefs in articles it is unnecessary to indicate the unverified nature of religious beliefs. However, this dissertation argues that when religious beliefs are argued as facts in the context of contentious political debates their unqualified inclusion in news stories becomes a form of disinformation and its unchecked inclusion in factual-based media can contribute to legitimizing them as facts in the view of some segments of the audience.

The coding also shows that certain types of disinformation went unidentified more often than others. The most common type of unidentified disinformation observed in the sample referred to the conflation of abortion to save the life or health of the pregnant person with decriminalizing abortion in general, which represented a third of all the unidentified disinformation (34 percent or 45 articles) and close to half of the identified disinformation (46 percent of 30 articles).

The second and third most important types of unidentified disinformation were present in practically equal proportion: the notion that the protocol has loopholes to make everyone eligible for abortion and the idea that the issuance of the protocol and/or its content is illegal (18.6 percent of the articles versus 17.8 percent). Among the articles with identified disinformation, the order was inverted, with the latter being the second more commonly observed (26 percent) and the former as the third more common (10 percent).

Section 4: Prominence of False Information

Of all the articles that included disinformation, one quarter (27 percent, or 52 news stories) prominently displayed the disinformation in the headline, sub-headline, and/or lede, and almost two-thirds of those the disinformation came from a religious source (63.4 percent or 33 news stories). In other words, religious disinformation was twice as prominent as non-religious disinformation.

For instance, the headline in the following news article by newspaper *La Nación* contains two types of non-religious disinformation (Sequeira, 2019).

"'Se abriría un portillo para abortos en caso de que la madre se encuentre en peligro[4]'"

"A loophole would be created in case the mother is in danger"

The first type of disinformation that can be identified in the headline is the claim that the protocol would create a loophole, which the text of the article identifies as lacking a factual basis for readers that go past the headline and lede of the story. The second type of disinformation refers to the notion that the alleged loophole would emerge "in case the mother is in danger." As explained earlier, the law and protocol exist precisely so that women with dangerous pregnancies can have an abortion and the explicit, main objective of a law or protocol cannot be considered a loophole. This aspect is not clarified at any point of the article, even though the narrative can contribute to positioning the law itself as a loophole in the public opinion as an attempt to undermine it in the context of a bill introduced around that time that would have eliminated that law.

The following article published by newspaper *La Nación* is an example of prominent religious disinformation.

Headline: ***"Jonathan Prendas: 'No hay enfermedad provocada por el embarazo que demande la muerte de la madre'***

Sub-headline: *Vocero del bloque de diputados independientes afirmó que no hay razón para firmar una norma técnica sobre el aborto impune y presenta proyecto*

[4] In Spanish, the headline is slightly different than the quote provided within the text of the article but the idea is the same. The headline says, "Se abriría un portillo para abortos en caso de que la madre se encuentre en peligro" and the in-text quote says "se estaría abriendo un portillo muy grande para que se realicen abortos en caso de que la madre se encuentre en peligro." The only difference that would be reflected in an English translation refers to the alleged loophole being "very large" in the second version of the quote.

para proteger vida del 'no nacido' desde la concepción, con el apoyo de 20 diputados."

Headline: **"Jonathan Prendas: 'There is no illness caused by pregnancy that leads to the death of the mother'**

Sub-headline: Independent legislators' block spokesperson said there is no reason to issue a protocol for unpunishable abortion and presented a bill to protect the life of the 'unborn' from conception, with support of 20 legislators."

The headline and sub-headline focus on statements by the representative of a religious political party who spread disinformation with some frequency and could be considered a "superspreader" (Zagni, 2021). He is quoted in the headline saying that pregnancies do not cause illnesses that can lead to death and the sub-headline does not identify the information as false, even though about a third of the news article is dedicated to quoting medical experts contradicting the religious politician and detailing different ways in which pregnancy can lead to a person's death.

In a few cases, prominent disinformation was identified as such in the same headline or sub-headline, such as in the next example in newspaper *La Nación* (Córdoba González, 2019).

Headline: ***"Iglesia apoya campaña contra interrupción del embarazo por salud y vida de la madre***

Sub-headline: *Movimiento busca cumplir 40 días continuos de oración en 493 ciudades del mundo; grupo se opone al aborto, tema que no está en discusión en Costa Rica."*

Headline: "**Church supports campaign against terminating pregnancy for health and life of the mother**

Sub-headline: Movement aims for 40 days of continual prayer in 493 cities

around the world; group opposes abortion, a topic that is not in discussion in Costa Rica"

As explained, anti-choice sources used disinformation in an attempt to create the perception that decriminalizing abortion was at stake in the country to distract from the fact that what they are opposing is abortion to save the health and life of pregnant people - an unpopular position, according to public opinion surveys. Joining an international campaign that focuses on regular abortion is consistent with those actions and this article is one of a handful that reports on related disinformation messages without losing track of the facts. As can be seen, the headline clearly conveys the Catholic Church's position against abortion to save the health and life of pregnant women while the sub-headline describes the anti-abortion campaign and in the same sentence clarifies the topic is not being discussed in the country.

In fact, the quantitative analysis suggests that including political-religious sources in a news story is significantly correlated with the inclusion of disinformation in a prominent position.

			Is the disinforrmation prominent?					
			1	2	3	4	5	Total
Did the story include Political Religious Elites?	1	Count	3	9	3	13	162	190
		Expected Count	3.2	5.1	4.4	7.9	169.4	190.0
	2	Count	5	4	8	7	266	290
		Expected Count	4.8	7.9	6.6	12.1	258.6	290.0
Total		Count	8	13	11	20	428	480
		Expected Count	8.0	13.0	11.0	20.0	428.0	480.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.430[a]	4	.022
Likelihood Ratio	11.204	4	.024
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.602	1	.107
N of Valid Cases	480		

a. 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.17.

Figure 6. Prominent Religious Disinformation

There was also a correlation between the most common type of disinformation (conflating abortion to save the life or health of a person with abortion for any reason) and headline prominence, regardless of whether the headline reflected the positions of actors in favor or against the protocol.

			Does headline generalize abortion and protocol?		
			1	2	Total
Was the headline Against?	1	Count	90	152	242
		Expected Count	61.5	180.5	242.0
	2	Count	32	206	238
		Expected Count	60.5	177.5	238.0
Total		Count	122	358	480
		Expected Count	122.0	358.0	480.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	35.688[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	34.447	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	36.863	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.614	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	480				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 60.49.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Figure 7. Disinformation "Against"

Note: In the table, 1 means Yes and 2 means No.

			Does headline generalize abortion and protocol?		
			1	2	Total
Was the headline In Favor?	1	Count	23	155	178
		Expected Count	45.2	132.8	178.0
	2	Count	99	203	302
		Expected Count	76.8	225.2	302.0
Total		Count	122	358	480
		Expected Count	122.0	358.0	480.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.302[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	22.266	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	25.069	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.253	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	480				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 45.24.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Figure 8. Disinformation "In Favor"

Section 5: Media-Introduced Disinformation

One aspect that was not captured by the quantitative analysis but emerged in the course of the qualitative analysis is that in some cases the disinformation seems to have been introduced by the journalists or the media outlets themselves, rather than as part of directly quoting or paraphrasing messages provided by the sources. Next are a few examples of the different ways in which that type of disinformation operated.

An article by newspaper *Diario Extra* about a pro-choice march that was announced in mid-2018 describes the main objective of the event as follows.

"Mujeres activistas exigirán legalizar el aborto
Nuevo movimiento organiza concentración frente a Casa Presidencial

Un movimiento a favor del aborto en Costa Rica, integrado por 46 organizaciones colectivas, está planeando una manifestación frente a Casa Presidencial para exigir la firma inmediata de la norma que apruebe esa práctica de manera legal, segura y gratuita en nuestro país.

La idea fue de 60 mujeres activistas bajo el nombre de 'Aborto Legal Costa Rica'.

'El movimiento exige la firma inmediata de la norma técnica para el aborto impune, conocido como aborto terapéutico, y que la misma contenga los más altos estándares médicos y de derechos humanos', indica un comunicado la organización" (Rojas Solano, 2019).

"Women activists will demand legalizing abortion
New movement organizes demonstration outside the Presidential House

A movement in favor of abortion in Costa Rica, integrated by 46 collective organizations, is planning a demonstration outside the Presidential House to demand the immediate signature of the protocol to approve this practice in a legal, safe, and cost-free way in our country.

The idea is of 60 women activists under the name 'Legal Abortion Costa Rica'

'The movement demands the immediate signature of the protocol for unpunishable abortion, known as therapeutical abortion, and that it includes the highest medical and human rights standards,' said the organization in a release'" (Rojas Solano, 2019).

While the organizers of the march support both the signature of the protocol and the decriminalization of abortion more broadly, the article combines the two different positions into one. The lede describes the organizations as demanding the signature of the protocol "to approve this practice" in reference to regular abortion, which is the only practice mentioned up to that point in the article - in the headline, more precisely. Furthermore, because the lede says "the practice" should be approved "in a legal, safe, and cost-free way," it is clear it is referring to regular abortion and

not therapeutical abortion as the latter already has those characteristics due to Costa Rica's universal health care system.

Conflating the protocol with decriminalizing abortion matches disinformation spread by anti-choice actors who seek to equate both things in the public opinion. The story then cites the name of the movement, which explicitly includes the words "Legal Abortion," and quotes their press release. However, the latter makes it clear that when they talk about the immediate signature of the protocol for "unpunishable abortion" they are talking about the "therapeutical" type rather than the legalization of abortion. There can be several reasons why the news outlet repeated disinformation spread by anti-choice actors by conflating the two petitions and determining the cause is outside the scope of this study, but it is relevant that no anti-choice source was cited in the news article to whom the disinformation could be directly or indirectly attributed.

Another news story, in this case about an anti-choice march, correctly says in the headline and the lede that protesters marched "against therapeutical abortion." However, the story conflates abortion to save the life and health of the pregnant woman with regular abortion by omitting any reference to therapeutical abortion in the rest of the story. Instead, it focuses on unwanted pregnancies, pregnancies caused by rape, and "legal abortion," all of which are unrelated to the conditions recognized by law as applicable for therapeutical abortion.

"Cientos de personas de distintos movimientos y organizaciones se sumaron la mañana de este sábado en San José a la denominada 'Marcha por las 2 vidas', para protestar contra la implementación del aborto terapéutico en el país.

El objetivo de la actividad era promover no solamente la defensa de la vida de los niños no nacidos, sino también de las mujeres que tienen un embarazo no deseado o son víctimas de violación.

'No solo protegemos la vida del niño, sino que sabemos que la mujer también necesita ayuda en ese momento. Ella requiere una ayuda real y no aborto legal. Por eso, lo que se tiene que hacer es un enfoque integral en el que se atiendan la necesidades de esas dos vidas', afirmó Carlos López, vocero del grupo Democracia en acción" (Traube, 2018).

"Hundreds of people from different movements and organizations joined this Saturday morning the 'March for the 2 lives,' to protest against the implementation of therapeutical abortion in the country.

The objective of the activity was to promote not only the defense of unborn children but also of the women who have unwanted pregnancies or are victims of rape.

'We do not only protect the life of the child but also know that the woman also needs help at that moment. She requires real help and not legal abortion. For that reason, what needs to be done is a well-rounded approach to tend to the needs of those two lives,' said Carlos López, spokesperson of the group Democracy in Action" (Traube, 2018).

It should be noted that in addition to the disinformation introduced by the outlet, the news article also repeats one of the common types of disinformation mentioned earlier, which relies on the notion that it is always possible to "save the two lives." The protesters are quoted extensively about it but at no point are they confronted with the medical reality that it is not always possible to save the two lives and that medical risks and emergencies can happen to pregnancies that are wanted. The story does not fact-check statements or mention the relevant scientific facts either. Furthermore, even though rape-based pregnancies are mentioned by organizers and protesters, they are not allowed under the terms of therapeutical abortion and this is not fact-checked in the story either. Additionally, the story quotes the source's statement that the woman needs "real help and not legal abortion," without clarifying that patients who are at fatal risk due to pregnancy need medical help that can only be legally provided through abortion. The notion that women need "help" to make

decisions about their own lives and deaths is not only infantilizing but also appeals to misogynistic tropes that portray women as unable to make rational choices.

Some news stories also include inaccurate or misleading statements or descriptions that regardless of their origin - whether error, bias, or adoption of anti-choice frames among reporters - in many cases match and/or could be understood as confirming disinformation spread by anti-choice actors.

Overall, the data show that fact-based news media repeated false or misleading information promoted by elite religious sources twice as often as they repeated non-religious disinformation.

The majority (66.5 percent) of all the disinformation included in the news articles was not identified as such and most of it (73 percent) was religious disinformation, which suggests reporters were less likely to fact-check or verify information provided by religious sources.

Similarly, the data show that a quarter (27 percent) of all the news articles that included disinformation displayed it in prominent positions such as the headline, sub-headline, or lede. In two-thirds of those cases, the disinformation was provided by religious sources, which suggests reporters were more likely to give religious sources or their messages prominent positions in the publications.

The next chapter explores whether the pattern of favorable treatment of religious sources in the news articles containing disinformation (40 percent of the sample) is also evidenced when analyzing the overall sample (100 percent of the news stories). The following chapter also explores whether the treatment of religious sources varied by type of media outlet or diverse newsroom leadership.

Chapter 7: Results: Pluralism and Diversity in the Digital Era

Section 1: The Pluralism and Diversity Question

Media pluralism theory has often been invoked in Latin America to explain traditional media's amplification of elite viewpoints, religious actors among them, and the minimization of nonelite viewpoints, such as those of women's rights groups. In essence, pluralism theory proposes that diverse media ownership leads to a wide range of sources (source pluralism), which are assumed to offer a full range of ideas (content or viewpoint pluralism) and allow citizens to consume all the information they need (exposure pluralism) to fulfill their democratic responsibilities (Napoli, 1999). In that framework, source pluralism has been interpreted as encompassing diverse media ownership and a diverse media workforce, including newsroom leadership level (Morisi, 2012). Hence, there is an expectation that the less concentrated the media ownership and workforce are, the more viewpoint pluralism will be available and vice versa.

In the first two decades of the 21st Century, the Costa Rican media system has become more diverse with the emergence of digital news outlets owned and/or with newsrooms directed by individuals from nonelite segments of the population. Half of the media outlets in the sample analyzed in this study are emerging digital outlets. Similarly, half of all the outlets in the sample are female-led and two are female-owned. Seen as a proportion of the sample analyzed here, most (70 percent) of the news stories were published by female-led outlets.

In that context, the theory would anticipate this new, more diverse media landscape to produce more pluralism of viewpoints in journalism, which in the case of Latin America could reasonably be expected to alter the amplification of religious viewpoints and minimization or exclusion of women's groups' viewpoints. This chapter explores whether pluralism is present in the sample or if a pattern of exclusion is present. It also explores whether coverage by emerging news outlets and female-led newsrooms differed significantly from traditional and male-led ones in their coverage of religious figures and women's groups, specifically in the context of the therapeutical abortion protocol process.

The news stories in the sample were coded to provide data to answer the following research questions:

RQ3: *Are religious sources' viewpoints included in news stories to the same extent and similarly prominent positions as women's groups' viewpoints?*

RQ4: *Do emerging news outlets differ from traditional ones in the extent to which they include elite and nonelite viewpoints and the prominence they assign to each?*

RQ5: *Do female-led news outlets differ from male-led ones in the extent to which they include elite and nonelite viewpoints and the prominence they assign to each?*

Section 2: Unequal Inclusion

This section describes the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses regarding the extent to which religious actors and women's rights groups were covered in the news stories and the amplification or minimization of their voices in the coverage. The data were examined using frequencies and showed that, overall, the sources received unequal treatment in news coverage and only a small proportion of the coverage included the three types of sources (government, women's groups, religious groups) actively involved in the process to issue the therapeutical abortion protocol.

According to the data, the views of the Government and the Religious Groups were included in 65 percent and 53 percent of the news stories, respectively, while Women's Groups' views were present only in 23 percent of the stories. Furthermore, in a third of that 23 percent, the references to the positions of Women's Groups were coded as "minimal," which means they consisted of a paragraph or less. This suggests that despite a more diverse Costa Rican media landscape, the elite actors who have historically received more media attention continue to do so while others continue to be minimized or excluded.

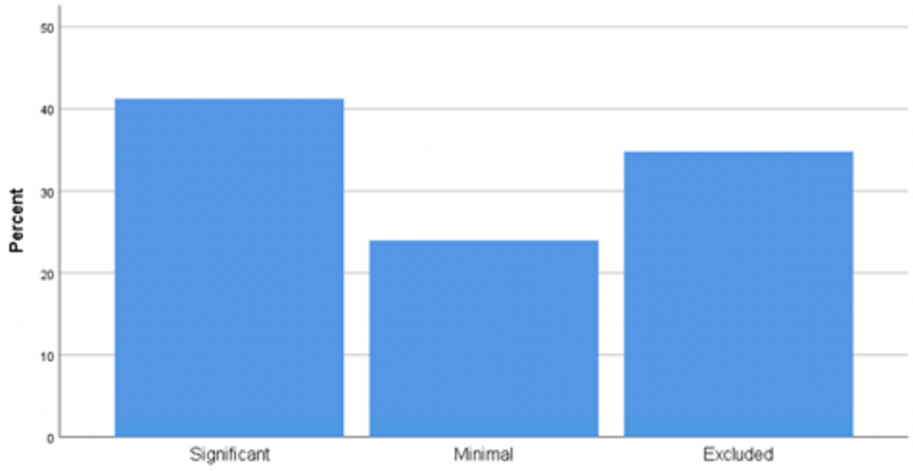

Figure 9. Government Inclusion

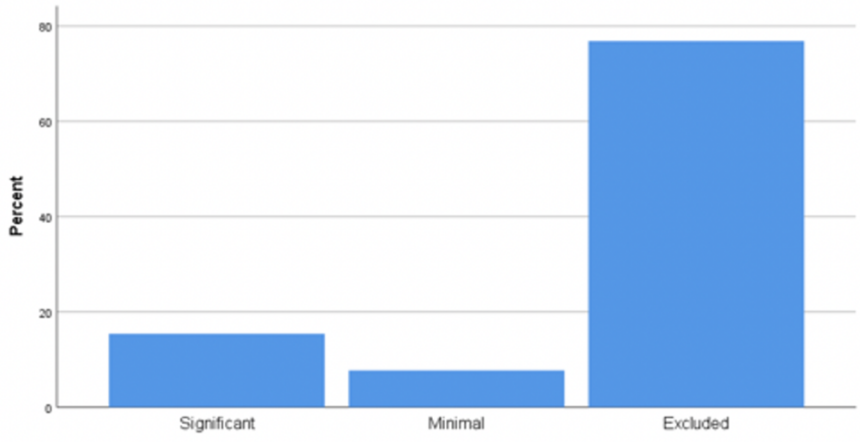

Figure 10. Women's Groups Inclusion

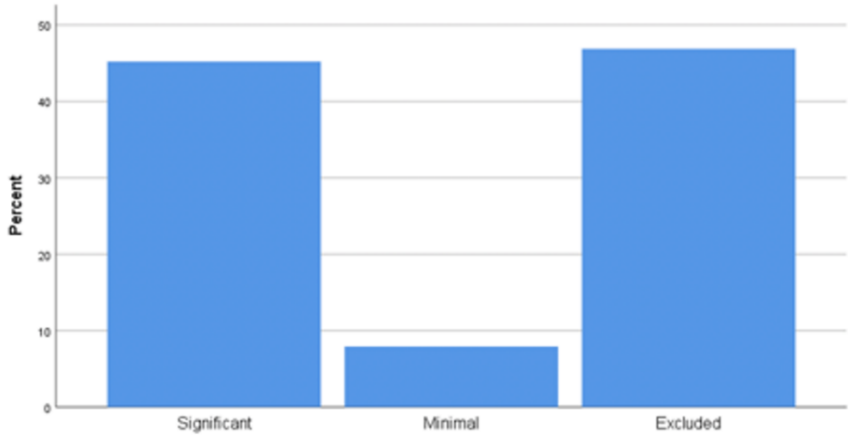

Figure 11. Religious Groups Inclusion

The qualitative analysis reveals that women's rights groups' perspectives tend to be included in the articles in a "significant" way - understood for this dissertation as a mention of more than a paragraph - in news prompted by women's actions, such as when they organize a march, release a documentary, take legal action against the government. They also tend to be included in a "significant" way when the stories deal with women's direct experiences with abortion, ranging from the number of women convicted for abortion to cases in which abortions were denied despite the danger to their lives. It is noticeable that the headlines in the majority of these stories tend to highlight positive or neutral positions about the therapeutical abortion protocol.

An example of this is a story published in newspaper *La Nación* about the announcement by a women's rights group that they had restarted legal action against Costa Rica, one of few stories present in the sample that explains in detail the perspective and actions of the women's rights groups.

"La Asociación Ciudadana Acceder confirmó la tarde de este viernes que retomó ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) el litigio para lograr una norma técnica en Costa Rica sobre el aborto terapéutico.

El trámite formal se interpuso luego de que fracasara un proceso de dos años, que arrancó en octubre del 2015, para la redacción de una especie de reglamento que regulara aspectos básicos como la identificación de situaciones de riesgo, y la forma de proceder en cuanto a plazos e instancias que, hasta ahora, no están claros en la práctica.

La norma, en la que trabajaron funcionarios del Ministerio de Salud y de la Cancillería, iba a imprimir claridad y seguridad jurídica al personal responsable de salud a cargo de tales procedimientos.

Su elaboración formaba parte de un proceso internacional amistoso de defensa de derechos humanos, que tiene origen en dos denuncias contra el Estado costarricense ante la CIDH" (Lara, 2018).

"The Acceder Citizen Association confirmed Friday afternoon that it has restarted its case in the Interamerican Human Rights Commission (CIDH) to achieve a protocol for therapeutical abortion in Costa Rica.

The formal action was taken after the failure of a two-year process, which started in October 2015, for the issuance of a type of rule to regulate basic aspects such as the identification of risk situations and how to proceed regarding deadlines and roles, which to date are unclear in practice.

The protocol, in which representatives of the Health and Foreign Affairs ministries worked, was going to imprint clarity and legal certainty for the medical staff that handles such procedures.

Its creation was part of an international human rights conciliation process originated in two suits brought up to the CIDH against Costa Rica" (Lara, 2018).

However, not all stories featuring women's groups' perspectives are prompted by women's groups' actions or women's experiences. For example, a news article published in *Diario Extra* focuses on the number of people convicted for abortion. The information was not directly reported or verified by the newspaper, but taken from a Facebook Live presentation by an anti-abortion politician, which included gross disinformation. The story indicates that in the past 19 years, 692 cases of consented or non-consented abortion were reported, 20 went to trial, and 10 ended in a jail sentence.

> *"Eso no quiere decir que fueron a la cárcel, sino que fueron condenadas. No tenemos el dato de si alguna persona fue a la cárcel, pero aquí hay un truco porque la sanción más grande para el delito de aborto en nuestro Código Penal, que es una norma de hace 47 años, es para los médicos o las personas que le practiquen un aborto a una mujer con o sin consentimiento", detalló (...) Según señaló Castro, la madre de buena fama está autorizada a dar muerte a su bebé si lo hace dentro de los 30 días de nacimiento. Aseguró que las penas rondan de 1 a 6 años de prisión a la madre que para ocultar su deshonra da muerte al hijo dentro de los 3 días siguientes de nacimiento"* (Granados, 2018).

> "'This does not mean the women went to jail, but that they were convicted. We don't know if anybody went to jail, but there is a trick here because the toughest sanction for the crime of abortion in our Penal Code, a law more than 47 years old, is for doctors or for the people who perform an abortion on a woman with or without her consent' (...) According to Castro, a mother of good reputation is authorized to kill her baby if she does it within 30 days of birth. He said that jail penalties range from 1 to 6 years for a mother who kills her child to hide her dishonor within the 3 days after the birth" (Granados, 2018).

It is false that Costa Rican law allows mothers to kill their babies "within 30 days of birth" and, while the law does provide for lesser penalties for women who have an abortion to "hide the dishonor" of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, it does not say that killing babies "within the 3 days after the birth" or any other specific period

carries a shorter sentence (Penal Code, accessed 2022). Despite the blatant disinformation, the news outlet does not fact-check the statements. The second part of the story consists of six paragraphs of statements by a women's rights leader. This is more space than women's views usually get in the news stories in the sample, but she is not asked about the politician's false statements described above or at least is not quoted about them. Instead, she is quoted explaining that the law allows abortion for health reasons and that the lack of clarity about how to operationalize that right makes it necessary to issue the protocol to ensure that in practice women can exercise their rights.

With regards to news articles with "minimal" inclusion of women's rights groups' views - understood for this dissertation as a mention of one paragraph - the qualitative analysis reveals that such mentions tend to take place mostly in stories about announcements made and/or actions taken by actors from the science, legal, civil society, and non-religious political sectors, whether in favor, against or neutral about abortion. These include, for example, the Government's announcements about the process to issue the protocol, statements by representatives of the medical regulatory board, citizens expressing a position in opinion polls or marches, pertinent statistics, and judiciary rulings, among others.

It is noticeable that the stories coded as making "minimal" mentions of women's groups' views are evenly divided in terms of the positions highlighted in the headline, with favorable, neutral/unclear, and negative representing close to a third of the sample each.

Some of these "minimal" mentions consist of references to women's rights groups' general position or background information about the origin of the protocol process, rather than statements made in interviews or press releases about the specific issues being covered in the articles. Hence, such mentions in news stories do not represent an opportunity for these groups to provide their perspective on the latest developments reported or to clarify disinformation abortion opponents may be spreading through the media at the time of publication.

For example, the newspaper *La República* seems to have a standard paragraph they add to stories about the abortion protocol, no matter what the story is about. It reads as follows:

> *"Precisamente, por estos hechos el país fue demandado ante la Corte Interamericana de los Derechos Humanos, ya que dos mujeres no pudieron interrumpir sus embarazos, sin importar que sus hijos no sobrevivirían fuera del vientre; situación que les generó problemas de salud mental."*
>
> "Precisely because of these facts, the country was sued in the Inter-American Human Rights Court by two women who were not able to interrupt their pregnancies, even though their children would not be able to survive outside the uterus, a situation that caused them mental health problems."

The paragraph was used in the stories "Iglesia Católica pide a Carlos Alvarado no firmar norma técnica de aborto" ("Catholic Church asks Carlos Alvarado not to sign the abortion technical norm"), "Paola Vega: 'Lo que esperamos es un pronunciamiento de la Iglesia a no violar niños'" ("Paola Vega: 'What we expect is an statement by the Church about not raping children'"), and "Nueva República exige a Carlos Alvarado debate sobre norma técnica del aborto" ("New Republic demands Carlos Alvarado debates the abortion technical norm").

The articles that made no mention of women's groups' views were coded as "No mention" and represent two-thirds of the entire sample. Most of those stories reported statements or actions of the abortion protocol

opponents and in the majority of cases the headlines highlighted negative views.

In sum, this analysis suggests that women's groups are more fully included in news stories when their own statements or actions prompt the news and, to a lesser extent, when sources from the science, legal, civil society, and non-religious political sectors were the main sources. However, they are generally excluded from stories focused on the actions or statements of opponents to their rights, who are usually - though not exclusively - religious groups. Inversely, religious' views were rarely mentioned in the stories in which women's rights groups had a "significant" mention and were included only in about half of the stories with "minimal" mentions. As a whole, the sample of news stories seems to paint a picture of a society in which it is not considered appropriate or relevant for female actors to defy or challenge religious ones such as in a news article, even when the issues discussed directly affect the former and the latter have no actual stake in the matter beyond their opinions against prioritizing women's health and lives in medical scenarios.

The articles in which both groups are quoted in a significant way involve religious political parties and their legislators - all evangelical - rather than religious figures in the traditional sense, such as the Catholic church and clergy. The few stories that include references to the views of both women and churches only include "minimal" references to the former and "significant" or "minimal" references to the latter. The story "*Iglesia Católica pide a Carlos Alvarado no firmar norma técnica de aborto*" ("Catholic Church asks Carlos Alvarado not to sign the abortion technical norm") published by newspaper *La República* is one example of this:

"El presidente Carlos Alvarado no debe firmar la norma técnica que regularía el aborto, según la Iglesia Católica.

La Conferencia Episcopal lanzó hoy una campaña denominada '40 días por la vida', en donde se realizará una oración a nivel mundial.

En campaña, el entonces candidato Alvarado se comprometió a promover el reglamento. El aborto impune es permitido en el Código Penal; sin embargo, por la ausencia de un protocolo que reglamente el procedimiento, en la práctica no se aplica.

Precisamente, por estos hechos el país fue demandado ante la Corte Interamericana de los Derechos Humanos, ya que dos mujeres no pudieron interrumpir sus embarazos, sin importar que sus hijos no sobrevivirían fuera del vientre; situación que les generó problemas de salud mental" (Arrieta, 2019).

"President Carlos Alvarado must not sign the technical norm that would regulate abortion, according to the Catholic Church.

The Episcopal Conference today launched a campaign called '40 days for life,' in which a global prayer will be performed.

During the electoral campaign, then-candidate Alvarado promised to promote the norm. Unpunishable abortion is allowed by the Penal Code; however, because of the absence of a protocol to regulate the procedure, it is not applicable in practice.

Precisely because of these facts, the country was sued in the Inter-American Human Rights Court by two women who were not able to interrupt their pregnancies, even though their children would not be able to survive outside the uterus, a situation that caused them mental health problems" *(Arrieta, 2019).*

The story focuses on the Catholic Church's position and only briefly mentions women's groups' views toward the end, using the standard paragraph that - as mentioned above - the outlet uses in articles about the abortion protocol. While it does not represent an opportunity for women's groups to directly engage with the issue covered or the latest developments in the protocol process, it does portray women as taking action to defend their rights.

Another example is the story "Cientos de costarricenses marcharon contra el aborto" ("Hundreds of Costa Ricans marched against abortion") published by the digital news outlet *El Mundo*:

"Cientos de costarricenses marcharon la mañana de este sábado en contra del aborto del Parque Central a la Plaza de la Democracia.

La marcha fue organizada por más de 70 organizaciones que apoyan la causa provida, entre las que se encuentran Alianza por la Vida, Despierta Costa Rica, Comité Provida CR, Frente Nacional por la Familia CR y Democracia en Acción.

Varias figuras de la Iglesia Católica invitaron a los fieles a participar en la marcha como es el caso del arzobispo metropolitano José Rafael Quirós y el obispo de Ciudad Quesada José Manuel Garita.

Los grupos feministas convocaron a una manifestación frente a Casa Presidencial para el 8 de agosto, día en que en Argentina se daría el fallo sobre la posible despenalización del mismo, es por esta razón que para los grupos provida costarricenses surge la necesidad de manifestarse hoy a favor de las dos vidas" (Angulo, 2018).

"Hundreds of Costa Ricans marched Saturday morning against abortion from Parque Central to Plaza de la Democracia.

The march was organized by more than 70 organizations that support the pro-life cause, among them Alliance for Life, Wake Up Costa Rica, Pro-life Committee CR, National Front for Family CR, and Democracy in Action.

Several Catholic Church representatives invited their followers to participate in the march, such as metropolitan archbishop José Rafael Quirós and Ciudad Quesada's bishop José Manuel Garita.

Feminist groups are organizing a demonstration outside the Presidential House on Aug. 8th, when Argentina will decide on the possible decriminalization of abortion, which is the reason why Costa Rican pro-life groups see the need to demonstrate today in favor of the two lives" (Angulo, 2018).

The focus of the story is a march against "abortion" organized by several civil society organizations and Catholic Church leaders are cited as inviting their followers

to participate in it, rather than as main organizers of the activity or as main sources of the story. It is in that context that the story references women's groups as organizing an upcoming pro-abortion demonstration to which the "pro-life" march is reacting.

Another type of story in which both women's and religious groups are mentioned involved indirect references to Catholic Church leaders rather than featuring them as main sources or quoting directly from their press releases or other communications. The article "Díaz: Destruimos la familia cuando se busca crear una norma técnica del aborto" ("Díaz: We destroy the family when we seek to create a technical norm for abortion") published by *El Mundo* is an example of that:

"La diputada socialcristiana Shirley Díaz, aprovechó su tiempo de control político para recordar el discurso del obispo de tilarán (sic), monseñor Manuel Salazar y aseguró que 'destruimos la familia cuando se busca crear una norma técnica para darle paso a la posibilidad del aborto'.

Díaz, reiteró su rechazo a esta norma y alegó que el pasado 21 de enero, 'este pleno le solicitó al señor presidente, mediante dos mociones, no firmar dicha norma'.

(...) Ayer decenas de personas provida se manifestaron frente a Casa Presidencial para que Carlos Alvarado no le dé trámite a la norma que regularía el aborto terapéutico en el país. Mientras que para mañana tendrá lugar también en Casa Presidencial una manifestación bajo la consigna 'Firme ya' convocada por el movimiento Aborto Legal Costa Rica, que exige la firma inmediata de dicha norma" (Martínez, 2019).

"Social Christian legislator Shirley Díaz used her political control time slot to quote a speech by tilarán (sic) bishop Manuel Salazar and said that 'we destroy the family when we seek to create a technical norm to give way to the possibility of abortion.

Díaz reiterated her rejection of the norm and said that on January 21st 'this Plenary asked the President, in two motions, not to sign this norm.'

(...) Yesterday dozens of pro-life people demonstrated outside the Presidential House asking Carlos Alvarado not to proceed with the norm that would regulate

therapeutical abortion in the country. Tomorrow will take place also in the Presidential House a demonstration with the name ‘Sign now’ organized by the movement Legal Abortion Costa Rica demanding the immediate signature of the protocol" (Martínez, 2019).

In the rest of the sample, the stories that focused on the Catholic Church's position on abortion did not reference women's groups' views. One example is the story "*Iglesia califica de ‘vergonzosas’ la promoción del aborto y la violencia contra las mujeres"* ("The Church calls "shameful" promoting abortion and violence against women") published by newspaper *La Nación.*

"Durante la homilía de este jueves, en la misa con motivo de la conmemoración de la aparición de la Virgen de los Ángeles, en Cartago, la Iglesia Católica calificó de “vergonzosas” la promoción del aborto en la sociedad costarricense y la violencia contra las mujeres.

Monseñor José Manuel Garita, obispo de Ciudad Quesada, aseguró que ambas son 'expresiones de la cultura de violencia y muerte' que, desde su perspectiva, imperan en Costa Rica.

Al enlistar las que la Iglesia considera manifestaciones vergonzosas, el cura denunció que la interrupción del embarazo 'no es más que matar la vida del más indefenso que está en el vientre de su madre'.

De hecho, hizo un llamado especial a los 'católicos que tienen responsabilidad legislativa, ejecutiva y judicial', a trabajar en 'el respeto irrestricto a la vida humana desde la concepción hasta su fin natural, descartando absolutamente el crimen del aborto, llámese como se llame, o como lo quieran llamar'.

Sus manifestaciones surgen pocos días después de que el mandatario Carlos Alvarado, en una entrevista con un medio guanacasteco, respondiera que él firmaría la norma técnica para la aplicación efectiva del aborto terapéutico cuando él considere que es el “momento oportuno”

De inmediato, Garita procedió a condenar también la violencia contra las mujeres.

“La ola creciente de violencia contra la mujer ha dejado ya 10 feminicidios en lo que va de este año; y que entre 2014 y 2017 se registraron entre 24 y 26 feminicidios por año", recordó el sacerdote" (Chinchilla, 2018).

"During the homily this Thursday, in the mass celebrated to commemorate the sighting of the Virgin of the Angels, in Cartago, the Catholic Church called "shameful" the promotion of abortion in Costa Rican society and violence against women.

Bishop José Manuel Garita, from Ciudad Quesada, said both things are 'expressions of the culture of violence and death' that, in his view, reigns in Costa Rica.

Listing what the Church considers shameful statements, the priest denounced interrupting pregnancies as 'no more than killing the life of the most defenseless beings inside their mother's uterus.'

In fact, he made a special appeal to 'Catholics who hold legislative, executive and judicial responsibility' to work on 'unrestricted respect of human life from conception to its natural end, absolutely discarding the crime of abortion, whatever its name, whatever they want to call it.'

His statements come a few days after President Carlos Alvarado, in an interview with a Guanacaste news outlet, said he will sign the technical norm for the effective application of therapeutical abortion when he considers it a 'timely moment.'

Immediately, Garita proceeded to also condemn violence against women.

'The recent wave of violence against women has already caused 10 femicides so far this year; and between 2014 and 2017 there were between 24 and 26 femicides per year,' the priest said" (Chinchilla, 2018).

The rest of the story includes reactions to the priest's sermon from President Alvarado and some legislators, both for and against abortion, but no women's groups' voices were referenced or quoted in the story. The only explicit reference in the story to the fact that the Church's sermon essentially called to let women with dangerous pregnancies die was from a legislator of a social Christian party quoted as follows:

"Yo desde la campaña fui muy claro en que yo estaba en contra del aborto en cualquiera de sus concepciones, a menos que esté en peligro la vida de la madre (...)

más que por un tema religioso es un tema de humanidad, es un tema de protección de la vida y al ser humano, y sobre eso no hay ninguna discusión en mi criterio."

"In the electoral campaign I was very clear that I was against abortion in any of its forms unless the life of the mother is in danger (...) more than a religious issue it is a matter of humanity, it is a matter of protecting life and human beings, and there is no discussion about this in my view."

Beyond the extent of the inclusion in the coverage, the data also points to a pattern in which it seems acceptable to routinely include only some of the voices actively involved in an issue in news articles about it. In fact, only 5.8 percent of all the news stories in the sample included the versions of all three of the main sources (Government, Women's Groups, and Religious Groups).

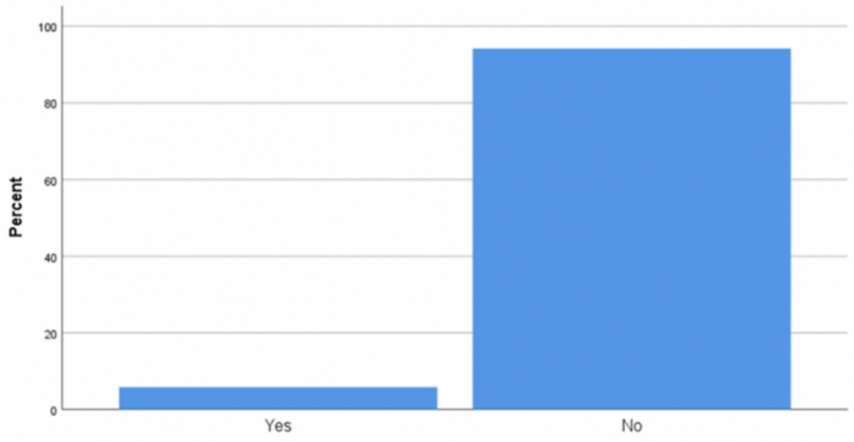

Figure 12. All Three Actors Inclusion

In some cases, the stories only include one voice - usually, the voice of the Government (18.5 %) or religious groups (16.5 %), and rarely Women's Groups' views (4 %).

Section 3: Unequal Prominence

The coding also provides data about the extent to which some voices' views received more or less prominent placement in the news articles. The data show a clear pattern: in over 80% of the articles, the headlines referenced the views of the Government, Religious Groups, and other types of elite actors.

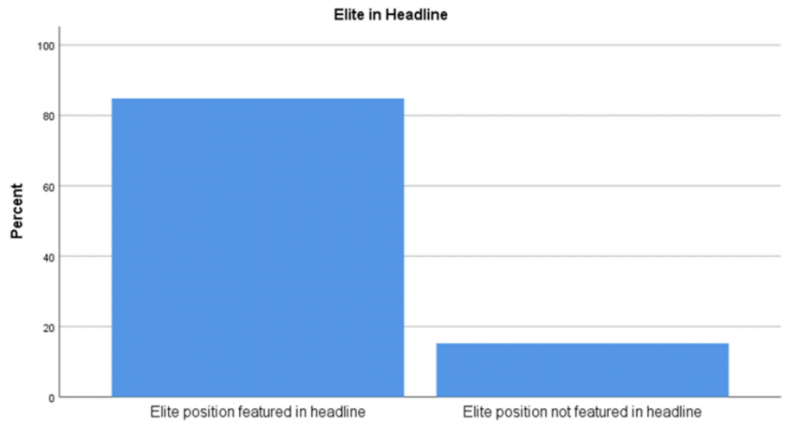

Figure 13. Elite Prominence

Religious Groups received the most prominence with 27.7 percent of the headlines referencing their views. This percentage includes both the views of religious political parties (20.8 percent) and the views of different churches (6.9 percent), mostly the Catholic Church. The Government's views received practically as much prominence (26.7 percent of the headlines referenced them). All combined, other elites such as non-confessional political parties, professional associations, courts, and international organizations, were referenced in headlines in 29.4 percent of the coverage; however, it should be noted that the prominence given to each category individually does not rival that of the Religious Groups and the Government.

The views of nonelite actors, in general, were referenced in headlines in 16.3 percent of the coverage, and the views of Women's Groups more specifically were included in headlines in less than 10 percent of the cases (9.8 percent).

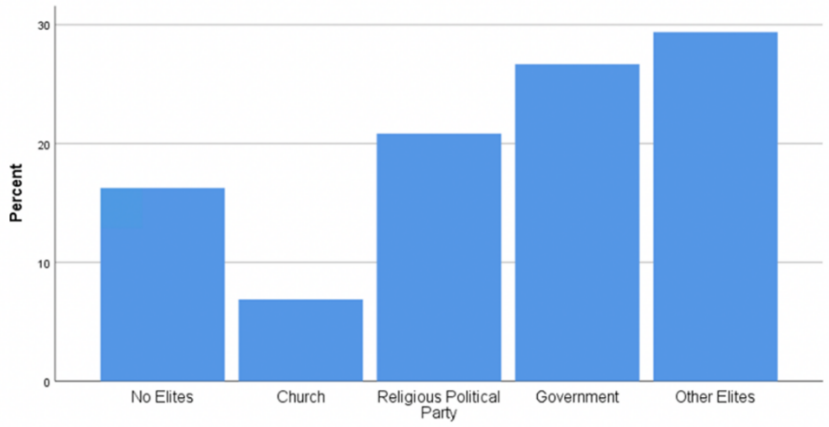

Figure 14. Elite Prominence by Type

Contrasting headline prominence for churches (mostly the Catholic church) with headline prominence for Women's Groups shows the latter received slightly more prominence (6.9 percent versus 9.8 percent). This seems consistent with the fact that the Catholic Church and its clergy made comparatively fewer public statements and public activities about the protocol, but most of them received prominent press coverage.

Catholic church coverage in the sample was usually prompted by press releases, bishops' sermons, priests' statements on social media, and the celebration of church-organized events, such as a march against "abortion" and a type of pilgrimage that occurs every year in August. The exception was legacy newspaper *Diario Extra*, which in a few cases asked the Catholic Church to provide a version about the topic of the therapeutical abortion protocol.

Overall, the sub-headlines in the majority of the stories (that had them) were also dedicated to the Catholic church's views. The stories tended to be comparatively longer and no other versions were included in them, except for references to actions taken by the government on the issue, statements by the President, and quotes from a few actors who agree with the Catholic Church's position on the matter. Two-thirds of these stories were published by two outlets in equal proportion: the traditional newspaper *La Nación* and the emerging digital outlet *CRHoy*.

An example of the above coverage is the story "*Obispo de Tilarán: La homofobia es 'antievangélica*' y "*La Iglesia católica tiene derecho a meterse en política*" ("Tilaran's bishop: Homophobia is anti-evangelical and "The Catholic Church has the right to participate in politics") by newspaper *La Nación* dedicates

both the headline and sub-headline to the Church. The sub-headline is comparatively long and says, "*Religioso aseguró que no están de acuerdo con los bloqueos de carreteras durante las huelgas, el aborto, la fecundación in vitro (FIV) y la eutanasia. Durante homilía en Cartago, el cura también pidió al gobierno mejorar la comunicación con los ciudadanos e instó al país a dialogar*" ("The clergyman said they disagree with highway blockages during strikes, abortion, in vitro fertilization, and euthanasia. During the homily in Cartago, the priest also asked the government to improve communication with citizens and encouraged the country to dialogue").

The story is 27 paragraphs long, of which 24 are dedicated to the bishop and three to the President. The President is the only other source mentioned in the story and the three paragraphs that reference him are placed at the bottom of the article quoting him as follows:

> *"El presidente Alvarado se refirió al mensaje del obispo al finalizar los actos religiosos y aseguró que lo recibe 'no solo en la mente sino en el corazón'.*
>
> *'En las últimas semanas he escuchado a diferentes sectores que se sienten discriminados y eso hace un llamado importante al diálogo y a la convivencia, principalmente a que el monopolio de la discusión no lo tienen los extremos o los extremistas', afirmó el mandatario.*
>
> *Agregó que existe una necesidad social de mejorar la convivencia y que trabajará en ello"* (Chinchilla y Jiménez, 2019).

"President Alvarado reacted to the bishop's message at the end of the religious service and said that he receives it 'no only in his mind but in his heart.'

'In the last few weeks, I have heard different sectors who feel discriminated and that makes an important call to dialogue and coexistence, especially to (understand) that extremes or extremists do not hold the monopoly of the discussion.'

He added there is a social need to improve coexistence and he will work on that" (Chinchilla y Jiménez, 2019).

In a couple of cases, versions from other actors are present in the articles and they are all supportive of the Catholic church's position. An example of this is the story "*Arzobispo pide no firmar la norma técnica*" ("Archbishop asks not to sign the technical norm") published by *Diario Extra*, which dedicates the first half of the article to the Catholic church's views and the second to statements by medical associations that support the Catholic church's position on the matter.

"Se debe recordar que a mediados de año el Colegio de Médicos anunció que la norma actual en el Código Penal que regula el aborto terapéutico es suficiente. Además, indicó que no conocía el protocolo a profundidad.

A lo anterior se suma la posición de la Asociación Médicos por la Vida, que se opone a la norma en cuestión y asegura que más bien traería inseguridad jurídica a los doctores.

'La terminación de un embarazo, por ejemplo, en enfermedades maternas como el embarazo ectópico, preeclampsia y eclampsia, se realiza como último recurso y su fin nunca es eliminar al hijo por nacer. Ninguna mujer embarazada con alguna situación de riesgo ha quedado desatendida por la inexistencia de una norma técnica de aborto', expresaron en la Asociación" (González, 2019).

"It should be remembered that mid-year the Medical Board announced that the Penal Code norm that regulates abortion is sufficient. Additionally, it indicated it did not know the protocol in depth.

The Medics for Life Association's position adds to that, as it opposes the norm in question and says it would create legal uncertainty for doctors.

'Ending a pregnancy, for example, in cases of mothers' illness such as ectopic pregnancy, preeclampsia, and eclampsia, is done as a last resort and its end is never to eliminate the child to be born. No pregnant woman in a risk situation has gone unattended because of the inexistence of a technical norm for abortion,' the Association said" (González, 2019).

Only one of the news stories featuring churches' positions in the headline refers to a group of evangelical churches. It was published by *El Mundo* with the headline "*Alianza Evangélica pide a sus afiliados 'alcanzar' a quienes 'de manera ingrata' apoyan norma técnica*" ("Evangelical Alliance asks its affiliates to 'reach' those who 'ungratefully' support the technical norm"), with the sub-headline "*Dicha norma fue firmada el pasado jueves por el presidente de la República, Carlos Alvarado*" ("The norm was signed last Thursday by President Carlos Alvarado"). The story consists of seven paragraphs and it does not include versions from any other actors.

> *"Además dijo que esperan criterio de autoridades médicas y legales para que les indiquen a que instancias correspondientes para traerse abajo el protocolo de aborto impune.*
>
> *'Continuaremos trabajando en favor de esta nación como hasta ahora lo hemos hecho y rogamos a todos y cada uno de nuestros afiliados que tampoco dejemos de hacer la labor que nos corresponde para poder alcanzar a todas estas personas que de manera ingrata e injusta siguen atentando ya no solo contra él (sic) no nacido, sino contra los valores y principios que tradicionalmente hemos tenido', agregó"* (Pérez, 2019).
>
> "He also said they await the reasoning of medical and legal authorities to know the pertinent instances to bring down the unpunishable abortion protocol.
>
> 'We will continue to work in favor of this nation as we have done so far and we beg that each and every one of our affiliates does not stop the work we must do to reach all those people who ungratefully and unjustly continue to attack not only the unborn but also the values and principles we have traditionally held'" (Pérez, 2019).

In sum, the news media coverage of churches' position on the issue of abortion to save women's lives and health usually included only the clergy's voices and a few other voices who agree with them. The exception seems to be the President

of the country, who is referenced or quoted in some of the stories, even though his office does not seem particularly interested in responding to religion coverage.

For example, *Diario Extra* published the story "*Conferencia Episcopal advierte al Presidente*" ("Episcopal Conference warns the President") covering a press release by the Catholic Church in which it says those who support the technical norm will be excluded from the Catholic rite of communion, including the President and the Minister of Health. The story quotes the Episcopal Conference as saying if they are Catholic believers the President and the Minister know what that means.

The news outlet sought a reaction from the President, and his spokeswoman is quoted as follows:

> *"DIARIO EXTRA buscó la reacción del gobierno, y por medio de Nancy Marín, ministra de la Comunicación.*
>
> *Marín insistió que le parece que en los temas religiosos lo que diga la Iglesia Católica es para sus fieles y creyentes.*
>
> *La jerarca añadió que los obispos saben bien lo que hacen cuando salen a realizar este tipo de comentarios. 'Los asuntos del Estado son los asuntos del Estado y las competencias de las instituciones no tienen nada que ver con los temas religiosos, sino de la gestión de lo público, y particularmente en este caso, con la salud pública y con la salud de las mujeres, y con el derecho a la salud de las mujeres', afirmó"* (Granados, 2019).

> "*DIARIO EXTRA* sought a reaction from the Government through Nancy Marín, Communication Minister.
>
> Marín insisted that in religious issues what the Catholic Church says is for its followers and believers.
>
> The official added that the bishops know well what they do when they make that type of comment. 'State affairs are State business and the institutions' competencies have nothing to do with religious topics, but with managing the public interest, and, particularly in this case, with public health and women's health, and with women's right to health,' she said" (Granados, 2019).

Other stories do not include a version by the President or mention any attempts by the news outlet to obtain one, even though some headlines directly allude to the figure of the President. In fact, in one of those stories the outlet tried to obtain further statements from the clergy.

The digital news outlet *CRHoy* published the story "*Sacerdote la emprende contra el presidente a quien llama 'Herodes'*" ("Priest attacks the President whom he calls 'Herod'") with the sub-headline "*Varios grupos religiosos han mostrado su oposicion (sic) a dicha firma*" ("Various religious groups have shown their opposition about the signature"). The article is based on a post by a Catholic priest known to make outrageous statements on social media. After the issuance of the technical norm, he posted a screenshot of a news story about the issue with the name "Herod" in red letters stamped over a photo of the President. The news article says as follows (the bold print is from the original):

"Pocos minutos después escribió: 'Ex comunión ***Latae Sententiae*** *(término latino utilizado en el Código de Derecho Canónico que literalmente quiere decir* ***'pena ya impuesta') al asesino de inocentes****.'*

Según la Biblia, ***Herodes ordenó matar a los niños nacidos en Belén con el propósito de acabar con Jesús****.*

Evangelio de Mateo 2:16-18: 'Al darse cuenta Herodes de que aquellos sabios lo habían engañado, se llenó de ira y mandó matar a todos los niños de dos años para abajo que vivían en Belén y sus alrededores, de acuerdo con el tiempo que le habían dicho los sabios. Así se cumplió lo escrito por el profeta Jeremías: Se oyó una voz en Ramá, llantos y grandes lamentos. Era Raquel, que lloraba por sus hijos y no quería ser consolada porque ya estaban muertos.'

CRHoy.com le envió un correo electrónico al sacerdote para conocer más detalles y opiniones sobre el tema, pero al cierre de esta nota no había dado respuesta a las consultas"(Quesada, 2019).

"A few minutes later he wrote: 'Ex comunión **Latae Sententiae** (Latin term used in the Code of Canon Law that literally means **'sentence already given') to the assassin of innocents**.'

According to the Bible, **Herod ordered the killing of children born in Belen with the purpose to destroy Jesus**.

Gospel according to Matthew 2:16-28: 'Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.'

CRHoy emailed the priest to know more details and opinions about the topic, but he had not replied when this story was prepared" *(Quesada, 2019).*

Women's Groups coverage in the sample was also usually prompted by public statements by feminist organizations in press conferences and social media platforms, as well as in the context of covering marches or other public demonstrations outside of government buildings and/or places where anti-abortion views were being discussed. The stories tended to be comparatively shorter than those dedicated to coverage of churches, and the use of sub-headlines was less frequent - though, when present, sub-headlines were often dedicated to expanding upon the positions of the Women's Groups featured in the headline.

Unlike Catholic Church coverage, where the voice of religious actors and those who agree with them were usually the only ones covered, the stories headlined by Women's Groups' perspectives or actions often included the versions of anti-therapeutical abortion actors, both religious and secular. For example, the article "*Defensores del aborto visitan Casa Presidencial*" ("Abortion defenders visit

Presidential House") published by newspaper *Diario Extra* inserts the Catholic Church's positions throughout the story about a demonstration organized by feminist groups outside the President's office. Additionally, the outlet asked a representative of a feminist organization for her reaction to the Catholic Church's position on the topic.

"Las organizaciones defensoras del aborto terapéutico se manifestarán hoy frente a Casa Presidencial, en Zapote, para exigir la posibilidad de legalizar esta práctica en el país. La concentración está pactada para las 4 p.m. y se espera la participación de cientos de personas que alzarán la voz contra el gobierno de Carlos Alvarado.

Estos grupos expresaron su molestia después de que el presidente asegurara que esta práctica no es prioritaria para su administración y que se implementará en el 'momento que sea oportuno'.

Incluso en la homilía que dio la Iglesia Católica en torno a las festividades del 2 de agosto condenó la posibilidad de que en el país se lleve a cabo esta práctica, tomando en cuenta que la vida se debe respetar desde la concepción.

(...) En cuanto a las expresiones de la Iglesia Católica (una de las organizadoras) dijo que, en vez de estar juzgando cada uno de sus pasos, deberían predicar con el ejemplo.

'De parte del Movimiento Aborto Legal Costa Rica consideramos que una organización religiosa que en otros siglos ha realizado asesinatos a mujeres no debería referirse a los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mismas y deberían predicar con el amor al prójimo'", señaló (Granados, 2018).

"Pro therapeutical abortion organizations will demonstrate today in front of the Presidential House, in Zapote, to demand the possibility of legalizing this practice in the country. The demonstration is planned for 4 p.m. and hundreds of people are expected to participate and raise their voices against Carlos Alvarado's government.

The groups expressed their annoyance after the president said this practice is not a priority for his administration and that it will be implemented 'in due time.'

In the Catholic Church homily for the Aug. 2nd festivities, it condemned the possibility that the country performs this practice, considering life must be respected from conception.

(...) About the Catholic Church's statements (one of the organizers) said that instead of judging each one of their steps, they should lead by example.

'In the Legal Abortion Movement, we think an organization that in other centuries assassinated women should not discuss women's sexual and reproductive rights and should preach with neighborly love'" (Granados, 2018).

Religious political parties and secular opponents to the abortion protocol are also quoted throughout news stories with headlines focused on Women's Groups' views. For instance, the story "*Aborto terapéutico debe incluir concepto de salud mental, según feministas*" ("Therapeutical abortion must include the concept of mental health, according to feminists") inserts opponents' views in the sub-headline, which says, "*Portillo no debe ser abierto por el presidente Carlos Alvarado de ninguna manera, advierten diputados conservadores*" ("Loophole must not be created in any way by President Carlos Alvarado, conservative legislators warn"). The body of the story describes the protocol approval process and opponents' views have slightly more space than Women's Groups.

"'La salud, como Costa Rica la ha venido trabajado, incluye la salud mental y en ese sentido, consideramos que la norma técnica sobre el aborto terapéutico debe atender ese concepto de la misma manera. En ese sentido, en casos de violación o por incompatibilidad con la vida, la mujer debería tener el derecho a decidir si esto afecta su salud emocional', dijo Larissa Arroyo, directora de la Asociación Ciudadana Acceder.

Sin embargo, un grupo de diputados autodenominados 'Pro Vida' exigió al presidente Alvarado que no firme la norma técnica sobre el aborto y de hacerlo, se expone a medidas 'fuertes'.

Se trata de legisladores de Nueva República -afín con Fabricio Alvarado -, Restauración Nacional, Liberación Nacional y la Unidad Social Cristiana. Para los legisladores, regular el aborto terapéutico por medio de un decreto sería una ilegalidad.

'Se trata de un irrespeto total a la división de poderes, ya que la mal llamada norma busca regular vía reglamento una ley penal, algo que solo los legisladores pueden hacer según lo establece el artículo 39 de la Constitución Política. Esta pretensión es absurda porque no se puede modificar un delito tipificado en la ley ordinaria, vía decreto ejecutivo', indica un comunicado enviado por el grupo parlamentario" (Arrieta, 2019).

"Health, as Costa Rica has understood the concept, includes mental health and, in that sense, we think the technical norm for therapeutical abortion has to treat that concept in the same way. In that sense, in rape cases and incompatibility with life, the woman should have the right to decide if that affects her emotional health," said Larissa Arroyo, director of Acceder Citizen Association.

However, a group of self-designated 'pro-life' legislators demanded President Alvarado to not sign the abortion technical norm and said that if he does, he will be subjected to 'strong' measures. These are legislators from New Republic - sympathetic to Fabricio Alvarado -, National Restauration Nacional, National Liberation, and Social Christian Union. For the legislators, regulating therapeutical abortion by decree would be illegal.

'It is a total disrespect to the division of powers because the so-called technical norm seeks to regulate with a rule a criminal law, something that only legislators can do according to article 39 of the Political Constitution. That pretense is absurd because it is not possible to modify a crime via executive decree,' says a communication by the legislative group" (Arrieta, 2019).

The above is consistent with a pattern of featuring church and clergy positions as unchallenged or supported by other voices, while women's voices tend to be featured as challenged or are asked to explain their stance with regards to religious views, reinforcing the idea that it is acceptable for religious actors - especially churches - to rebuke women's positions but not the other way around.

Some articles with headlines dedicated to Women's Groups' views displayed the use of derogatory terms to qualify women's statements and/or events participation, something that articles with headlines dedicated to churches and clergy did not do. For example, an article by digital news outlet *El Mundo* published a story about a pro-

abortion march with the headline "*Miles de mujeres toman San José al grito de: ¡El patriarcado se va a caer!*" ("Thousands of women take San José to the yell of Patriarchy will fall!"). The body of the story did not make any references to "yell" or "yelling."

Another example is the article "*Feministas piden aborto en UCR*" ("Feminists ask for abortion at UCR") by *Diario Extra* about a demonstration organized by the feminist group Las Rojas outside a place where an anti-therapeutical abortion panel was being held. The body of the article describes the women's demonstration as "*Tambores, brincos, gritos, vítores y pancartas fueron parte del movimiento de las manifestantes*" ("Drums, hops, yells, cheers, and signs were part of the movement's demonstrators"). Then the story covers one of the participants in the anti-therapeutical abortion panel as follows:

> "*Sobre la protesta afuera de la sala de conferencias, lamentó que las jóvenes no quieran que haya posibilidad de que otras personas dominen diversos argumentos, por lo que ven fácil pegar gritos.*
>
> *'Esto es intolerancia y es ridículo que pidan tolerancia cuando ellas no la tienen. El aborto no cuestiona el cuerpo de ellas, no es el cuerpo de la mujer del que se habla, es del cuerpo de alguien más, es otro cuerpo, otra existencia', aseveró*" (Jiménez, 2018).

> "About the protest outside the conference room, (she, the panelist) regretted the young girls did not want the possibility that other people master different arguments, so they find it easier to yell.
>
> 'This intolerance and it is ridiculous that they ask for tolerance when they do not have it. Abortion does not question their bodies, it is not the woman's body that we talk about, it is somebody else's body, is another's body, another existence,' she said" (Jiménez, 2018).

Newspaper *La Nación* titled a story "*Aborto, Arias y sacerdotes: los gritos más fuertes en marcha del Día Internacional de la Mujer*" or "Abortion, Arias and priests: the loudest yells in the International Women's Day march."

The use of terms like "yells" and "hops" was not observed in the coverage of pro-abortion demonstrations and marches, even though an examination of videos of some such activities show yelling and the use of megaphones, and is reminiscent of the misogynistic trope of the "hysterical woman," traditionally used to liken women's public and/or political demonstrations to hysterics as a way to delegitimize them (Chang, 2020).

Using Hallin's conception of journalistic objectivity, the articles in the sample tended to cover religion from the sphere of consensus, understood as an implicit agreement among journalists that the "official line" is the only correct point of view, and women's rights groups from the sphere of deviance, understood as a space where it is allowed to exclude and/or ridicule those whose views are considered radical, irresponsible, or dangerous. A small proportion of the articles seems to fall within the sphere of legitimate controversy, in which an issue can be debated among different parties with a plurality of views (Hallin, 1986). However, this dissertation would argue that it is misogynistic for religious (mostly male) voices to be considered "legitimate" participants in a technical, medical debate about women's right to life and health.

Section 4: Anonymizing Prominence

The qualitative analysis revealed another type of disparity in the prominence of coverage of the two actors. The majority of the headlines about the Catholic Church consist of sentences with a clear subject, such as "Church," "Bishop," "Bishops," "Episcopal Conference" and "Priest," to whom specific actions are attributed, such as condemning something, making a demand, or organizing a public event. In contrast, the majority of the headlines about Women's Groups lack a subject and the actions are attributed to unnamed, generic actors, which creates what could be called an "anonymizing prominence." This is done by using the verb conjugation for the generic third person "they." In Spanish verbs have specific conjugations for each person, so it is possible to use the verb conjugated in the third person without the need to use a pronoun or name a subject.

For example, the headline "*Convocan a manifestación para exigir firma de norma técnica sobre el aborto*" in a story by the newspaper *La República* could be translated as "(They) Convene demonstration to demand signature of abortion technical norm" or "Demonstration convened to demand signature of abortion technical norm." Digital news outlet *El Mundo* published the story "*Este jueves habrá manifestación en Casa Presidencial para exigir firma de norma técnica,*" which can be translated as "This Thursday there will be a demonstration outside of the Presidential House to demand signature of the technical norm."

Newspaper *Diario Extra* published the story "*Exigen firma de norma para aborto*," which can be translated as "(They) Demand signature of abortion norm." In another example, a story in the newspaper *La República* about a documentary

released by Acceder Citizen Association, the organization leading the legal suit against Costa Rica for failing to respect women's right to therapeutical abortion, is titled "*Documental sobre Aurora, mujer que (sic) le negaron aborto terapéutico, estará disponible desde mañana*" ("Documentary about Aurora, the woman who was denied a therapeutical abortion, will be available starting tomorrow") does not mention who made the documentary and the body of the story does not either.

The "anonymous prominence" mentioned above is also visible in news stories with headlines that use a subject but in a diffuse way, such as "women," "movement," "abortion defenders," "groups," "feminists," and other generic terms used instead of naming specific women's organizations behind the fight for the technical norm and their leaders. A few examples of such headlines include "*Defensores de norma técnica de aborto llegarán este jueves a decirle al Presidente #FirmeYa!*," ("Abortion technical norm defenders will go tell the President on Thursday #SignNow!"), "*A pesar de la lluvia, mujeres se manifiestan afuera de Casa Presidencial para exigir firma de norma técnica*," ("Despite the rain, women demonstrate outside the Presidential House to demand signature of the technical norm"), "*Estos datos justifican exigencia de norma técnica para aborto impune, dice Movimiento*," ("These data justify demand for a therapeutical abortion technical norm, Movement says"), and "*Feministas critican que gobierno podría firmar una norma técnica restrictiva para aborto impune*" ("Feminists criticize that government could sign a restrictive technical norm for therapeutical abortion").

In a few cases, the use of diffuse subjects could be due to the large number of small organizations convening certain public events; however, diffuse subjects are

also widely used in stories based on the statements or actions of one organization. For example, the article "*Aborto terapéutico debe incluir concepto de salud mental, según feministas*" ("Therapeutical abortion must include the concept of mental health, according to feminists") published in the newspaper *La República* is based on statements by Larissa Arroyo, director of the Acceder Citizen Association, group that took legal actions against the country and led many of the related lobbying efforts. However, the headline refers to her and her organization with the generic "feminists" and only names the leader and the organization in the body of the story. Even the lede of the story, which summarizes the organization's position, fails to attribute it to Arroyo or her organization, who are only named in the fifth paragraph.

"*Si la norma técnica sobre el aborto terapéutico que redacta el Gobierno de Carlos Alvarado utiliza el concepto integral de salud que incluye el bienestar físico y mental –como lo ha venido usando el país desde hace años-, se permitiría la interrupción del embarazo en los casos de violación, o cuando el niño sea incompatible con la vida fuera del vientre materno.*

A pocas semanas -o quizás días- de que se dé a conocer el polémico documento, los grupos de derechos humanos y a favor de las mujeres exigen al mandatario que cumpla con su promesa de campaña, mientras que diputados conservadores autodenominados "Pro Vida" le advierten de un boicot legislativo si él avanza con este tema.

La polémica se da porque se requiere de un reglamento técnico que regule el derecho al aborto terapéutico, el cual ya se contempla en el Código Penal, pero que no se ha aplicado por la falta de una guía sobre el tema.

La norma técnica para aplicar el aborto impune ya existe y está en las últimas revisiones, aseguró Daniel Salas, ministro de Salud. La firma se dará en algún momento del año, pero sin precisar cuándo.

"La salud, como Costa Rica la ha venido trabajado, incluye la salud mental y en ese sentido, consideramos que la norma técnica sobre el aborto terapéutico debe atender ese concepto de la misma manera. En ese sentido, en casos de violación o por incompatibilidad con la vida, la mujer debería tener el derecho a decidir si esto

afecta su salud emocional", dijo Larissa Arroyo, directora de la Asociación Ciudadana Acceder" (Arrieta, 2019).

"If the technical norm for therapeutical abortion being drafted by Carlos Alvarado's government uses the concept of integral health that includes physical and mental wellbeing - as the country has been doing for years -, it would allow the interruption of pregnancies in rape cases, or when the child is incompatible with life outside the uterus.

Weeks - or perhaps days - before the controversial document is made public, human rights and women's groups demand the president fulfills his campaign promise, while conservative legislators self-denominated 'pro-life' warn him about a boycott if he makes progress with this issue.

The controversy originates in the need for a technical norm that regulates the right to therapeutical abortion, which is already included in the Penal Code but has not been applied due to the lack of guidance on the topic.

The technical norm to apply therapeutical abortion already exists and is in the last revisions, said Daniel Salas, Health minister. The signature will take place sometime this year, but without giving a specific date.

"Health, as Costa Rica has understood the concept, includes mental health and, in that sense, we think the technical norm for therapeutical abortion has to treat that concept in the same way. In that sense, in rape cases and incompatibility with life, the woman should have the right to decide if that affects her emotional health," said Larissa Arroyo, director of Acceder Citizen Association " (Arrieta, 2019).

Only one story in the sample identifies a specific group, Las Rojas, in the headline ("*Las Rojas: Con el pañuelazo repudiaremos la charla de la antiderechos Chinda Brandolino*" or "Las Rojas: With the pañuelazo we will repudiate the talk by anti-rights Chinda Brandolino"). It also includes the leader's last name, Valencia, in the sub-headline ("*Valencia considera que el Gobierno y el presidente de la República 'dan luz verde' al conservadurismo, debido a la demora de la firma de la norma técnica*" or "Valencia said the Government and the President 'give green light' to conservadurism with the delay to sign the technical norm"). The main photo in the

story shows a group of women holding a sign with the name of the organization clearly visible.

The qualitative analysis also revealed a similar disparity in the use of photos in news stories in which Churches and Women's Groups are prominent. In the majority of the stories with headlines dedicated to Churches and their clergy, the main photos feature bishops, priests, and pastors preaching in the pulpit, posing for a group photo, or being interviewed. In most cases, the faces of the individuals are clearly visible. In a few cases, the main images in the stories were of religious symbols - for example, "La Negrita," a piece of rock Catholics in Costa Rica relate to the Virgin Mary and do a pilgrimage to her location every year with the expectation of receiving miracles or wishes -, fetuses, or the facade of the Episcopal Conference.

Figure 15. Church Prominence

In contrast, the majority of the stories with headlines dedicated to Women's Groups use photos that anonymize the organizations engaged in political efforts for

therapeutical abortion and their leaders. Most of the photos show people holding signs in marches and similar public events, whether the story is about such an event or not. Many photos focus on the signs, with the faces of the people holding them hidden behind the signs or entirely out of the shot. Some photos only show the backs of protesters' heads and many feature the signs alone, without any person in sight. One story features a sign in English from a pro-abortion march in the United States. Only a handful of images show a clear face or name of an organization: the minister of Women's Affairs, Larissa Arroyo, a group of three women speaking in a press conference, and a sign with the name of a women's rights group.

Figure 16. Women's Groups Anonymizing Prominence

Section 5: Pluralism, Emerging Media, and Newsroom Leadership

This dissertation also sought to assess potential differences in terms of pluralism between the coverage of emerging and legacy news outlets. To examine the issue, a Chi-Square test was used to identify correlations between the outlet type and the inclusion of at least all three main sources in the news stories. As discussed, in pluralism theory the existence of more diverse media outlets is expected to facilitate more viewpoint diversity in the content published. However, no significant correlation emerged ($p = .139$), even though more diverse owners, directors, and sources are present in the Costa Rican media system nowadays. In fact, the proportions of the coverage that included the views of all three main actors were relatively similar between legacy and emerging media, with the former including them slightly more often.

Similar results emerge when looking for correlations between outlet type and viewpoint inclusion in the articles' headlines: Government ($p = .127$), religious political parties ($p = .143$), churches ($p = .853$) or Women's Groups ($p = .722$). As shown in the images below, even in nominal terms the approaches by both types of outlets were fairly similar. Correlations were sought with regards to the types of inclusion (significant or minimal) of the viewpoints of three main types of actors as well, and no significance was found either.

This dissertation also sought to explore potential differences between news outlets with female editors in chief versus those with male editors in chief. As previously mentioned, 70 percent of the news stories analyzed were published by female-led outlets. This percentage is partly explained by the fact that one of the

emerging outlets led by a female director published more often about the issue than any of the other five, but it should also be noted that each of the three female-led outlets generally published more news stories about the issue during the period of study than any of the three male-led outlets.

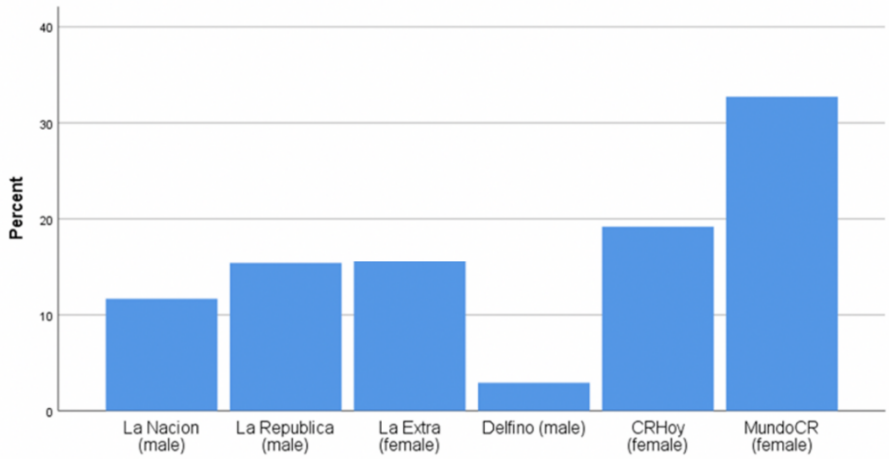

Figure 17. Female Directors Published More

A qualitative review of the news stories shows that, while all news outlets in the sample published short stories - understood as four-to-five paragraph-long articles - at one point or another during the period of study, this form of publication was generally more common in two of the female-led outlets and one of the male-led ones. Often, these shorter stories focused entirely on statements made by one source and lacked the versions of other sources and relevant context provided reporters could

have provided such as, for example, fact-checking sources' statements. That was especially the case of the digital news outlet *El Mundo*, which publications generally seem designed to generate clicks and are usually based on press releases, comments made by public figures on their social media channels, and other "minimum effort" methods.

Correlations were explored between the gender of the outlets' directors and the diversity of viewpoints (as represented by the inclusion of all three actors) in the news stories, and the Chi-Square test found marginal significance (p = .051).

		Includes 3 Sources		
		Yes	No	Total
Gender of Outlet Director	Female	15	321	336
	Male	13	131	144
Total		28	452	480

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.822[a]	1	.051		
Continuity Correction[b]	3.036	1	.081		
Likelihood Ratio	3.555	1	.059		
Fisher's Exact Test				.058	.044
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.814	1	.051		
N of Valid Cases	480				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.40.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Figure 18. Gender and Inclusion

However, the significance, in this case, does not seem to be explained by pluralism's theoretical assumptions. In fact, the opposite seems to be at play. As the tables below show, in nominal terms female-led outlets more often failed to include all three main actors, were more likely to exclude the views of women's groups, tended to give elites' views more prominence, and their headlines were more likely to prioritize negative views about abortion to save the health or life of pregnant women.

		Women's Groups Inclusion Type			
		Significant	Minimal	Excluded	Total
Outlet Name	La Nacion (male)	7	6	43	56
	La Republica (male)	17	6	51	74
	La Extra (female)	14	5	68	87
	Delfino (male)	0	4	10	14
	CRHoy (female)	12	6	74	92
	MundoCR (female)	24	10	123	157
Total		74	37	369	480

Figure 19. Gender and Women's Groups Inclusion

		Elite in Headline		
		Elite position featured in headline	Elite position not featured in headline	Total
Outlet Name	La Nacion (male)	48	8	56
	La Republica (male)	65	9	74
	La Extra (female)	71	16	87
	Delfino (male)	14	0	14
	CRHoy (female)	76	16	92
	MundoCR (female)	133	24	157
Total		407	73	480

Figure 20. Gender and Elite Prominence

		Headline Against		
		1	2	Total
Outlet Name	La Nacion (male)	25	31	56
	La Republica (male)	29	45	74
	La Extra (female)	46	41	87
	Delfino (male)	6	8	14
	CRHoy (female)	51	41	92
	MundoCR (female)	85	72	157
Total		242	238	480

Figure 21. Gender and Negative Headlines

A Chi-Square analysis of the data shows a significant correlation between generalizing “abortion” in the headline and the gender of the outlets’ directors. As discussed in an earlier chapter, public opinion in the country is favorable to abortion for medical reasons, even if it remains mostly negative in general. To avoid a backlash from the public opinion for trying to stop pregnant women to save their lives and to capitalize on existing negative views about abortion decriminalization among the population, opponents of abortion for medical reasons adopted the strategy of referring to therapeutical abortion simply as abortion. This study coded the news stories according to whether the headlines used the word abortion to refer to news about therapeutical abortion. The Chi-Square analysis showed a significant correlation between generalizing “abortion” in the headline and the gender of the outlets’ directors ($p = .000035$), with female-led outlets more likely to generalize in the headlines. Figure 22 below also shows in nominal numbers the extent to which each outlet generalized.

		Generalizes Abortion		
		1	2	Total
Outlet Name	La Nacion (male)	6	50	56
	La Republica (male)	13	61	74
	La Extra (female)	38	49	87
	Delfino (male)	0	14	14
	CRHoy (female)	28	64	92
	MundoCR (female)	37	120	157
Total		122	358	480

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30.372[a]	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	33.533	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.212	1	.271
N of Valid Cases	480		

a. 1 cells (8.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.56.

Figure 22. Gender and Generalization

No significant correlation was found between including disinformation in the articles and the specific outlets, though the nominal numbers also show that female-led publications tended to repeat disinformation more.

		Contains Disinformation		
		Yes	No	Total
Outlet Name	La Nacion (male)	19	37	56
	La Republica (male)	30	44	74
	La Extra (female)	39	48	87
	Delfino (male)	2	12	14
	CRHoy (female)	33	59	92
	MundoCR (female)	71	86	157
Total		194	286	480

Figure 23. Gender and Disinformation

Even though both the political and media landscapes in Costa Rica are now more diverse than in the past, the results described here are consistent with the literature cited in earlier chapters, according to which religious figures have traditionally been part of the Latin American male-dominated elites that enjoy the benefit of extensive and usually favorable coverage of their faith-based viewpoints about issues ranging from family planning to economic policy. This dissertation argues that the presence of this pattern of favorable media treatment of religious sources remains, with coverage of religious figures serving as a driver of disinformation and reaffirmation of the exclusion of certain segments of the population.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

Section 1: Religion Coverage as a Conduit for Disinformation and Exclusion

Past literature on religion and news media focused on whether secular news coverage is disadvantageous to religion but this dissertation explored the opposite approach. That is, whether secular coverage of religion can be advantageous to religion compared to coverage of marginalized groups whose rights religion and its institutions and leaders have historically persecuted. A specific political process involving religious groups and a marginalized group – women - was chosen for analysis in a Latin American country known for a free press and stable democratic rule, but also a majority Christian population and "religious state" status in its Constitution. A content analysis of coverage of that political process was based on media pluralism theory, which has been often invoked in the region to discuss unequal media access. Media coverage as a political resource can strengthen or weaken a political actor's standing in a political debate. This analysis also sought to determine how religious disinformation may spread through fact-based media and whether any differences surface between legacy and emerging news reporting.

Results suggest that religion coverage was a conduit for spreading religious disinformation through fact-based legacy and emerging outlets. Fact-based news media repeated false or misleading information in 40 percent of the sample. While not all disinformation came from religious sources, the press repeated religious disinformation twice as often as non-religious disinformation.

The majority (66.5 percent) of all the disinformation included in the news stories was not identified as such and, in most cases (73 percent), it was religious disinformation that many reporters were unlikely to fact-check or verify, far from displaying an anti-religious slant in their reporting.

The data also revealed that about a quarter of the news articles (27 percent) with disinformation were displayed in prominent positions such as an article's headline, sub-headline, or lede. In two-thirds of those articles, the disinformation was supplied by religious sources. This suggests reporters were more likely to give religious sources and their messages prominent positions in the articles even when the sources were spreading disinformation.

Religious sources in the sample benefitted from a permissive coverage marked by a "silk glove" treatment by several news outlets, which enabled them to prominently spread disinformation, often without clarification for news consumers to understand the false or misleading nature of the information.

This dissertation did not set out to determine why religion coverage looks the way it does. The underlying soft treatment of religious sources could be explained by several reasons such as pro-religion biases in reporters and editors and sensationalism when extreme statements by religious sources are expected to attract clicks online. Other possible reasons can include newsroom routines or reigning cultural notions that dictate religious sources merit prominent coverage because of who or what they represent. In this analysis, religious sources promoted more disinformation than secular sources. The analysis reveals that secular coverage of religious sources is not

necessarily "anti-religion" and, in fact, according to media pluralism theory, it can grant religious sources further communicative power they can leverage and benefit from in political processes and their standing in the political arena more broadly.

Another outcome from this analysis was confirmation that religious actors such as clergy (Catholic) and politicians (evangelicals) often use disinformation in their political communication strategies and can inject disinformation into fact-based news streams more efficiently than other sources. This is why it is essential to study the phenomenon of religious disinformation within academia and newsrooms. As reviewed for this dissertation, the related literature is minimal and almost always presented from a religious perspective. Most research has focused on the spread of disinformation about religious texts or doctrines rather than on disinformation spread by religious actors for political gain.

Furthermore, if religious disinformation is spreading through fact-based media to the extent found in this dissertation, it is also relevant to question how much is flowing through conservative ideological media outlets and religious print, digital channels, TV, and radio outlets operated by Catholic and evangelical churches.

Scholarship exploring whether the effects of religious disinformation differ from other types of disinformation is also limited. This is important given the powerful psychological mechanisms underlying both disinformation and religious beliefs that discourage verification and critical thinking – sometimes also explicitly discouraged by religious leaders – and which could have different implications to identify and tackle disinformation. The rise of religious political ambition and power

through much of the West in the first two decades of the 21st Century should prompt more research on religious disinformation, its uses, effects, and strategies to combat it.

Another aspect deserving attention is the portrayal of religious beliefs as fact in political news coverage. Coverage can inherently endorse religion rather than maintaining an impartial position, as is expected of professional journalism. This is not to say that simply quoting religious actors making statements like "God is against abortion" or "only God can give or take life" is necessarily partializing in favor of religion. Rather than quoting sources without noting that these are beliefs people choose to have despite limited or non-existing factual basis is inaccurate at best and misrepresentation of facts at worst. While it may be safe to assume audiences are generally aware that religious beliefs are faith-based rather than factually verifiable, many news consumers believe in every word religious leaders say. That is why the media has a responsibility to inform and educate citizens rather than serve merely as a conduit for unchecked information by political actors, especially religious ones in the context of a political battle against persecuted minorities whose human rights are at stake. Striving for journalistic impartiality is particularly important given the rising religious intromission in politics. Since these processes can limit or eliminate the rights of millions, ideologies and narratives should receive impartial treatment and as much scrutiny as any political source would.

This dissertation also demonstrated that news coverage of religion can exclude or minimize marginalized groups such as women who have been persecuted

historically by religious institutions and leaders. The analysis showed that the government's primary sources, plus women's and religious groups all engaged in the political process, but received unequal coverage. Only 5.8 percent of the stories coded included all three. Views of the Government were included in 65 percent of the news stories, which was to be expected since it makes formal decisions about the process. In addition, the Government held consultations with legal and medical experts and other stakeholders interested in influencing the process.

However, coverage of the other two main actors – the religious and women's rights groups – revealed an important disparity. Religious groups appeared in 53 percent of the news stories. In comparison, women's rights groups appeared in 23 percent of the coverage, and a third of that percentage included only minimal mentions in one paragraph or less. At the same time, religious actors received the most prominent coverage. Nearly 28 percent of the story headlines sampled referenced religious groups' views or actions. The Government's views received slightly less prominence in headlines at 26.7 percent, and the positions of women's rights groups were featured in less than 10 percent of the headlines.

These results suggest that despite a more diverse Costa Rican media landscape, elite religious actors who have historically received more media attention continue to do so. Similarly, marginalized groups continue to be excluded from most news media coverage. This is not to say that there have not been changes. Some changes may result from women's groups perhaps being more organized and vocal today, the erosion of the Catholic Church's credibility following sexual abuse

scandals, and the migration of sympathizers from Catholicism to evangelicalism. However, no data was found that could support a valid comparison of such variables.

Framed another way, data for this analysis showed that religious news coverage served as a public space where the power unbalance between religious elites and women's groups was reaffirmed. This difference was in terms of prominence and in terms of which stories included or silenced the voices of women's rights groups. The results paint a picture of a society in which the media does not consider it appropriate or acceptable for female actors to defy, challenge or contradict religious authorities, especially clergy, even in medical topics that directly affect women's health and lives and in which religious actors have no expertise or incumbency.

This study's qualitative analysis suggested that the coverage of women's rights groups fighting for therapeutical abortion regulations often depended on who was the prominent voice in an article. The voices of women's rights groups were generally included in a substantive way when the news was prompted by their own actions, such as organizing a march, taking legal action, releasing a documentary, etc., or in stories focused on women's direct experiences with abortion, such as denial of therapeutical abortion rights or abortion charges.

Women's voices are reduced to minimal mentions (one paragraph) when news stories report actions taken by government, science, legal, civil society, and non-religious political sectors, regardless of whether those voices were in favor, against, or neutral about abortion. Examples are government announcements about the process, statements by representatives of the medical regulatory board, opinion polls,

marches, statistics, and judiciary rulings, among others. These mentions often consist of references to women's rights groups' general positions or background information about the origin of the protocol (women suing the Costa Rican government), rather than statements made in interviews or press releases about the specific issues being covered in the articles. Therefore, these mentions do not necessarily represent an opportunity for these groups to provide their perspective on the latest developments reported in the articles or a chance to clarify disinformation abortion opponents may be spreading through the media at the time of the publications.

Women's voices were rarely included in the news that focused on the statements or actions of opponents of women's rights. In most cases, these were sources from religious groups. The more negative the headline was to the technical norm process, the less likely it was for the story to include the views of women's groups. However, there seems to be a distinction in the type of religious actor. Women's groups were sometimes included in stories that focused on the position of a religious actor when that actor was an evangelical politician, a religious party legislator, or a candidate. In contrast, stories focusing on actors from the Catholic clergy did not include voices of women's groups. Again, this result supports a pattern in which journalism seemed to be impregnated by notions in which it is not acceptable for an all-male clergy to be questioned, contradicted, or interrupted by anyone and especially not women.

The opposite happened with news articles focused on views or actions of women's groups in those cases, in which religious and secular opponents of

therapeutical abortion were asked for their opinion. This is consistent with the media's pattern of featuring church and clergy positions as unchallenged or supported by other voices. In contrast, women's voices were most often portrayed as challenged or questioned by religious voices, reinforcing the notion that it is acceptable for religious actors to rebuke women's positions but not the reverse.

Stories focusing on the Catholic clergy included only their voices, other voices that agreed with the Church's views, or the voice of the country's President. Symbolically, this sets a standard for who is publicly legitimated or allowed to respond, defy or contradict the Catholic clergy. In this sense, secular coverage can be favorable to religion and contribute to protecting its status quo in society despite a significant loss in followers.

All but one of the stories focused on the clergy centered on Catholic figures. The exception was a story centered on the views of evangelical clergy that did not include the position of women's rights groups either. However, it is not possible to make inferences from that story alone, especially considering that evangelical clergy in the country has never enjoyed the aura of respectability of their Catholic counterparts and that the news coverage of evangelicals tends to focus on their political parties rather than the clergy (even if the pastors are often also the politicians). A subsequent analysis of the coverage of evangelical clergy - separate from its role in political parties - is needed to determine if it has gained respectability in media representation over time, especially since evangelicals have gained more political power.

This dissertation looked beyond inclusion and prominence to also explore whether news articles that dedicated their headlines to announcements or actions by religious and women's rights groups displayed contrasting characteristics. This analysis compared headlines dedicated to the Catholic Church with headlines dedicated to women's rights groups. As explained in Chapter 7, most headlines dedicated to the Catholic Church consisted of sentences written with a specific subject, such as "Church," "Bishop," "Bishops," "Episcopal Conference" and "Priest," or actions attributed to them, such as condemning a law, making a demand, or organizing a public event. There were slightly more stories with headlines dedicated to women's groups, but the research revealed disparities that favored the church.

Headlines focused on women's rights groups were not as specific. Instead, actions were often attributed to unnamed, generic actors (using the Spanish conjugation for "they," which enables the construction of sentences without naming a specific subject) or diffused subjects, such as "women," "movement," "abortion defenders," "groups," and "feminists," instead of citing concrete women's organizations in the fight for the technical norm. Similar anonymization was recorded in photographs. As detailed in Chapter 7, stories dedicated to Catholic bishops, priests, and pastors used photos that showed them preaching, posing with a group, or being interviewed and depicted their faces looking into the camera, while stories about women's rights groups displayed impersonal images of marches where signs were the central elements. Faces were not prominent since some photos were taken behind people’s backs or with people’s faces hidden behind the sign they were

holding. In only a couple of cases were the leaders of the women's rights groups featured in photos.

Overall, such coverage of women's rights groups creates what could be called an "anonymizing prominence," with coverage highlighting legitimate news actions but minimizing the actor. If we follow the theoretical understanding of media coverage as a political resource, then this anonymization or mute prominence can be understood as maiming the political teeth or edge that the news coverage could provide those actors in the context of a political battle. Such a disadvantage is especially critical if the coverage of their opponents in that battle does highlight the actors.

Being the focus of media coverage is also theorized to legitimize an actor's social or political standing in society and, therefore, the discriminate use of "anonymizing prominence" denies some actors the legitimization granted to others. It legitimizes others by strengthening or reaffirming their standing, even actors that lack expertise or the incumbency to intervene in medical and other debates. The tacit message of the coverage analyzed in this study, as a whole, is that some actors and their positions were in the news because of who they are in society, as if they were authoritative characters. Others were newsworthy even though they were framed as unworthy characters in the stories.

The latter is further highlighted in some stories focusing on women's rights groups, which use derogatory terms to qualify women's statements or participation in public events. Such characterization of women groups is reminiscent of the

"hysterical woman" misogynistic trope traditionally used to liken women's public or political demonstrations to hysterics as a way to delegitimize them. Coverage of similar events led by churches did not use disqualifying language. For example, descriptive terms such as "yells" and "hops" used in coverage of marches in favor of the technical norm were not used in coverage of demonstrations and marches against it, even though video from the latter events showed that yelling and megaphone use was also common.

This analysis did not find unfavorable characterizations of religious sources despite elements that could have merited it, including false or misleading information, a lack of expertise and incumbency in medical and legal affairs, or a general disregard for the lives and health of pregnant women. It can be concluded that far from displaying an anti-religion stance, secular news coverage of religion augments the spread of religious messages, even when messages include disinformation and pose a direct danger to women’s lives and health. Secular coverage reaffirms religion's standing in society and political debates by covering the issues favorably while minimizing, mischaracterizing, or ignoring the voices of marginalized groups.

This dissertation also contrasted coverage of religion by emerging versus legacy news outlets. According to the literature, diverse media contribute to media pluralism by facilitating viewpoint diversity, and emerging outlets in the region are generally considered to have added ownership diversity to the traditional media landscape. Some scholars even theorize Latin American legacy media as a conduit for the "consensus of the elites" and emerging digital outlets as helping "Latin Americans

actively to re-engage with problems neglected by the legacy commercial media" (Castillo, 2018, p. 2-3). This analysis, however, did not find significant differences in the sample coverage by emerging and legacy media in terms of pluralism. Legacy media even included all three main points of view in the news articles slightly more often than emerging media. Furthermore, one of the emerging media outlets tended to publish lower-quality articles consisting of only a few paragraphs quoting only one actor without context. Presumably, such articles were intended to generate social media buzz and online traffic.

Additionally, emerging media in the region are often discussed as non-profit models, but those analyzed in this sample are all for-profit news operations. Results suggest that more research is necessary to determine how non-profit and for-profit business models for emerging media in Latin America resemble and differ and the extent to which differences impact coverage and factors such as pluralism. Similarly, more research is needed to identify and explain how decisions about religion coverage are made. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, journalists reflect and replicate the social contexts, with their power imbalances and injustices included. The coverage analyzed appears to mimic Latin American societies in which religious actors, especially clergy, are still perceived as political elites deserving of coverage even when it involves disinformation or little expertise or incumbency in the issues. The news media, including both emerging and legacy, also seem to be replicating church dynamics in which the clergy speak and individuals listen in silence. This is reflected in news stories dedicated to clergy's statements in which no other sources

are quoted unless they agree with the Church or hold the highest office in the country, thus excluding women's rights groups from being covered in such articles.

Media pluralism's expectation that greater diversity in media outlets produces viewpoint diversity was also explored in the context of women's leadership positions in newsrooms. However, female-led outlets – half of the sample – more often failed to include all three main actors in the articles, were more likely to exclude the views of women's groups, tended to give elites' views more prominence, and their headlines were more likely to prioritize negative views about abortion to save the health or life of pregnant women. The headlines of the female-led outlets were more likely to prioritize negative views about abortion when saving the lives of pregnant women. This supports newer approaches to media pluralism that focus not on diversity counts (number of owners, sources, etc.) but on content and, more specifically, on whether certain viewpoints are excluded from news content because the factors that intervene in the creation of pluralism go beyond media ownership, media type, or newsroom leadership. As Fox (2002) explains, pluralism "also covers different values, cultures, tastes, and religions. This poses a challenge because values, cultures, tastes, and religions are normally carriers of a culture's exclusionary ideas against certain groups" (p. 78). The role of religion in perpetuating exclusionary ideas - even through members of excluded groups - has not been sufficiently studied in regards to its potential influence on journalistic norms and practices in general and certainly in the widely-religious Latin American region.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations of this dissertation. The analysis focused on the news coverage of one political issue. It is impossible to say that the results represent the existence or absence of pluralism in that media system more broadly. For instance, analyzing the news coverage of a political process involving a different set of actors could reveal more pluralism if, for instance, religious figures were not part of the process. Another limitation is the absence of literature analyzing coverage of religious figures to compare with current results. A comparison could reveal changes over time even if the analysis for this dissertation did not find what could be plural news coverage in the present. A different choice of emerging news outlets could also produce different results. The selection of these outlets was based in part on online traffic, but it is possible that analyzing less popular outlets could have provided a more pluralistic coverage and led to different results.

Section 2: Implications and Further Research

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this analysis are consistent with media pluralism scholars such as Tambini, who posit that more diversity per se does not ensure the absence of exclusion and, therefore, does not ensure pluralism. Despite a more diverse Costa Rican media system with more outlets, owners, and newsroom leaders from non-traditional groups, the coverage of the political process analyzed in this study generally repeated the traditional media's habits of legitimizing the voices of religious elites while minimizing the viewpoints of the marginalized groups. Even

when included in prominent coverage, marginalized groups generally received an anonymizing and delegitimizing treatment.

These results are also consistent with media pluralism scholars such as Karppinen, who argue that pluralism as a broader societal value requires approaching journalism in terms of how it can alter the distribution of communicative power and influence in society. According to this perspective, journalism can challenge existing truths and empower new voices, but also homogenize cultures, reinforce existing power relations, and generate social conformity. Therefore, the concerns about pluralism are about how its practice can reinforce or challenge existing asymmetries in communicative power. The analysis conducted in this dissertation shows that the news coverage reinforced long-existing asymmetries in communicative power favorable to religious elites and disempowered new voices (politically active women's rights groups), with treatment that ranged from exclusion from the articles to granting an anonymizing type of prominence.

The challenge is understanding how pluralism as a normative principle can or should affect practical decisions about who should be included in news stories and how. Karppinen argues that the practical implications depend on the journalism model. For instance, based on McQuail's normative frameworks, Karppinen elaborates that under the "reflection" framework, plural journalism consists of proportionately reflecting the current political and cultural standings. By contrast, under an "equality" framework, journalism is expected to give equal access to all points of view regardless of their perceived popularity. Similarly, in the "choice"

framework, the emphasis is on the range of available sources. In the "openness" framework, the priority is offering "new ideas and voices for their own sake" (Karppinen, 2018, p. 9).

This dissertation argues that pluralism's practical implications should depend on a simpler premise beyond any journalism framework: doing no harm. Suppose pluralism helps define how journalism reinforces or challenges existing power relations by including or excluding actors from the news coverage. In that case, the journalistic practice should not tilt the playing field against any of them by disempowering, silencing, or delegitimizing any actor through journalistic coverage. In the context of a specific political issue or debate, there will usually be power asymmetries among actors caused by a range of societal factors. Journalistic intervention should not be one of those factors, at least not if journalism is to stay true to the principle of impartiality in political coverage. At a practical level, this suggests an awareness of the power interplay in the process or conflict covered and how journalism intervention can reinforce or challenge existing power relations. At the least, journalistic decisions should be made as a function of the actions and their positions within the issue(s) being covered, rather than exogenous factors such as an actor's popularity or perceived authority. Specifically, decisions about covering religious-based issues should not be made based on actors' popularity or elite status, or, in the case of women's rights group, based on their historic marginalization from past political decision-making. Instead, journalism should be attuned to the specific issue at hand. In the case studied here, the power balance has shifted due to a more

robust political standing for women's rights groups, and journalism should acknowledge and portray that.

In principle, the idea of doing no harm has been directly or indirectly acknowledged by the core journalistic tenets of fairness, balance, and impartiality and, in theory, ensure all stakeholders in a political debate are included in the distribution of communicative power. However, as some scholars note, balance, objectivity, fairness, and neutrality are often used interchangeably in the field. Furthermore, the concepts lack standardized, widely-accepted practical implications for journalism (Benham, 2019, p. 793). Pluralism as a concept can be more precise in its practical implications concerning the coverage of political debates because coverage decisions are based on a more tangible or finite set of power relationships. Journalism can and should serve to advance social change and fight injustice, which implies disrupting power asymmetries. If that happens, it should be a result of journalistic practice, not differentiated treatment of actors based on popularity, marginalization, media ownership, values, cultures, religions, or a culture's exclusionary ideas against certain groups.

The implications for media pluralism in Latin America revolve around the need to move away from focusing on media ownership as a supposed formula or requirement for plural journalistic coverage and starting to tackle difficult discussions related more to values, cultures, tastes, and religions as sources of political power for elites and distribution of content. The focus on media ownership is useful for elites to balance their political power battles, especially at the electoral level. However,

ownership is not useful for balancing power between elite and nonelite groups – as evidenced by the current environment in which digital technologies have lowered the entry barriers into media markets, content creation, distribution, and consumption, without correcting deeply rooted anti-pluralistic news coverage practices. This realization poses a challenge: media ownership policy and regulation have long been possible in democratic settings because they are not – or at least are not meant to be – directly intrusive of content. Creating policy and regulations to affect journalistic content would be intrusive. Since intervention in journalistic content is undesirable in democratic systems, putting into place structures and incentives conducive to forming plural journalism structures is an area to explore.

A further challenge is that policy-makers, media owners and workers, and audiences are largely carriers themselves of the values, cultures, tastes, and religions that perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of certain groups. Exclusionary ideas within religious beliefs and structures may be particularly difficult to disentangle from both policy-making and journalistic coverage due to the reasons discussed throughout this dissertation. Specifically, many continue to perceive religion as a common good worthy of obedience, respect, and protection – under the threat of eternal punishment in an alleged afterlife – rather than an exclusionary social control mechanism that helps elites maintain their status quo. Another challenge is that policy-makers, media owners and workers, and audiences carry values, cultures, tastes, and religions, thus helping perpetuate certain groups' exclusion and marginalization. Even though the Latin American citizenship redefinition process mentioned in Chapter 2 can challenge misogynistic, homophobic, and racist

conceptions of national identity, the process rarely challenges religious ideas, institutions, and leaders who continue to promote such conceptions and code them into policy and law through their intromission in political processes. In that context, the privileged coverage that religious groups continue to receive in such not just reaffirms rather than challenges the legitimacy of different political processes in which religion intervenes formally and informally but also helps tilt the playing field in their favor. This is an area that academic, policy-making, and journalistic circles need to study based on media pluralism's responsibility to make informed decisions.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" or clear set of solutions to the issues outlined here. However, indispensable first steps are identifying the focus on media ownership as a distraction from the real problem and assessing the presence or absence of pluralism in journalism content directly rather than through proxies (such as media ownership) to determine the extent of the problem on any given outlet, context, or media system.

Overall, this dissertation makes several contributions. It shows that the field of religion and news media has underestimated how much religious institutions and leaders receive favorable news coverage, sometimes at the expense of the marginalized groups they persecute. This dissertation also documents this phenomenon, even if it is only in one country. The results show why much more work needs to be done in Western Christian democracies, in general, and the American continent specifically. This is particularly important now that religious groups throughout the continent have deepened their political influence on all levels

of government. Future research should also explore the hypothesis that Latin American media is generally favorable to elite religious figures, especially Catholic Church clergy, and whether their evangelical counterparts are gaining similar media treatment with the mass migration of sympathizers from Catholicism to evangelicalism.

This dissertation also contributes to the nascent study of religious disinformation as a phenomenon worthy of academic analysis by documenting how religious groups can use their access to media coverage to inject disinformation into fact-based media and thus spread it with an aura of credibility. This also allows disinformation to spread more widely than through religious and ideological channels alone, often without journalistic fact-checking. Future research questions should ask whether the combination of religion and emerging or legacy media credibility produces a more potent form of disinformation and whether reporters are more or less likely to fact-check religious disinformation with respect to other political disinformation. Research should also explore whether favorable coverage of religious figures originates from individual pro-religion bias in individual reporters and/or from newsroom routines that still dictate religious elites deserve prominent coverage based on traditional notions of religious authority over society.

This dissertation also contributes to pluralism theory. The results of this analysis support newer theoretical approaches to pluralism by scholars who, like Tambini, question earlier notions of pluralism that defined it in terms of owner, source, and content diversity. Instead, they argue that a diversity of actors does not

preclude the exclusion of others from the media space. Since exclusionary media cannot be considered plural media in the democratic sense, then media diversity does not amount to media pluralism. To define media pluralism, scholars such as Karppinen propose a power relations framework that explicates how journalism reinforces or challenges existing power relations by including or excluding actors from news coverage. The results of this dissertation support that newer approach. Furthermore, this dissertation also contributes a coding scheme that can be used to measure any news coverage from a media pluralism framework focused on the communicative power distribution function of the media.

Despite a more diverse media environment and months of coverage that included the three main groups of actors (government, women's rights groups, and religious groups) plus actors in the medical, legal, international, citizen organizations, and other sectors, results show a marked pattern of sustained exclusion of one leading actor from most of the coverage. One implication for the media pluralism debate in Latin America is the need to update the terms of that debate. If the focus continues to be on media ownership, the debate should be detached from broader concepts such as pluralism. Media pluralism should not be used to legitimize a debate that is essentially focused on an intra-elite power competition. Practical implications of this theoretical approach for journalism were discussed above and call for making news coverage decisions mindful of how journalism can reaffirm or challenge power relations, especially in terms of how granting or denying news coverage can worsen power asymmetries to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. Further research should examine whether correlations exist between pluralism, media

ownership, and intangible factors (values, cultures, religion, etc.) and, if so, if any one factor is strongest or weakest.

This dissertation also contributes to existing research about emerging digital media in Latin America. Much of the literature focuses on non-profit outlets, especially successful cases that have broadened traditional news agendas and seemly contributed to media pluralism. But less knowledge exists about for-profit news operations that have emerged in the region, which may have different vocations than the non-profit outlets. While this study's three news outlets do not represent the entire region, results show concerning signs that merit expanded research. One of them is their ability to reach broad audiences with poor quality but cost-free articles and the effect this may have on the market share of high-quality outlets that go behind a paywall in small media markets. Another aspect worthy of research is their similarity with traditional media's news agendas and whether this is a function of their for-profit business model, the hiring of reporters from traditional media, or other factors.

In conclusion, how religion coverage serves as a conduit for the spread of disinformation and the exclusion of marginalized groups. It is an area in which the research has only scratched the surface and much knowledge remains to be gained.

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