

## INTRODUCTION

The media holds a position in society, where the interests of political actors, elites, and the public are intertwined. The idea that an informed citizenry is essential to the functioning of democracy is reiterated since the time of Plato, and then Mill, and in modern society the news media have been imbued with the duty of keeping the public informed and thereby serving a crucial democratic function. Yet, democratic ideals do not always serve elite interests, and this particular role of the news media can at times be seen as at odds, or even detrimental, to those interests. The consequence, naturally, is a perpetual conflict over the content and framing of news. However, the presence of a conflict in and of itself does not determine the outcome. The variation in the levels of freedom of speech across democracies is testament to this. Therefore, in order to understand this variation, our analysis must go beyond observing the fact of conflict, and rather engage with the mechanisms through which elites can succeed or fail in their attempt to control news content.

A commonly espoused view of mass media portrays it as considerably independent and powerful, capable of bringing down governments, a potential threat to national security and welfare because of its insatiable appetite for sensationalism, perhaps even scandal. Although this approach has not been embraced by academics, it is frequently referred to by politicians when attacking publications and journalists with the charges of not being sufficiently patriotic or endangering the security and the stability of the country. Recently, the same logic and arguments have been used generously by government officials against the British daily *The Guardian* in the Snowden affair, and against sources that published the WikiLeaks documents. Similarly, mass media faced considerable backlash from political elites over the Watergate scandal, when those who chose to publish and follow up on the story were held responsible for the resignation of the

Nixon administration. Any news contradicting an ongoing war effort or simply exposing the crimes committed during one, such as in Vietnam or Iraq, may be followed by denunciations of the media as unpatriotic. This view, as expressed overwhelmingly by political figures, assumes a great deal of independence on the part of the editors and writers, not only from state interference but also from corporate control. However, the mechanisms through which such autonomy is rendered possible are rarely explained, despite the confidence with which its adherents assert their claims.

On the flip side of the matter, the competing view more generally advanced by a considerable proportion of civil society organizations, holds that the government can exert considerable control over the media and censor unfavorable content. While the mechanisms through which authoritarian governments, military regimes, or dictatorships can impose censorship are evident, they remain less obvious for democracies. In those cases, the sources of the government's power over media are explained in large measure by the government's strength and capacity, made up of a multitude of factors ranging from electoral support to control over the judiciary, from the relative weakness of institutions to government ideology. The legal dispute over the publication of the Pentagon Papers is a good example, as it took a bitter legal struggle between *The New York Times* and the government before the papers could be printed (Sheehan et al. 1971). Accounts embracing this orientation tend to conclude that illiberal, personalistic, patronage-based, or otherwise poorly institutionalized democracies are more likely to successfully suppress the news media. Annual reports from organizations such as Freedom House exemplify this kind of reasoning when explaining why/when a country's ranking declines or its freedom of speech is threatened. The unfavorable conditions for freedom of expression in countries such as Russia, Turkey or Venezuela are understood through this prism. Although this

approach can better identify mechanisms for censorship than the previous approach can justify conceptualizing the media as fully independent, there are nonetheless considerable gaps in this reasoning. It remains unclear in this approach how it is that governments are able to exert control on a corporate-dominated media, given the absence of a strong understanding of state-capital relations in these explanations. A better theory would be able to take into account the considerable literature on the limitations of a state's powers, when confronting large and influential business groups. Without demonstrating how a state can mobilize such capacity when faced with a corporate dominated media, the analysis fails to provide a satisfactory explanation.

In this paper, I ask why some governments are able to successfully co-opt the media, while others are not. Under what conditions will media executives consent to a government's application of its institutional and judicial powers, and when do they resist? I will argue that successful suppression occurs when the domestic elites support the regime's broader economic and political project. In what follows, I will first present an overview of the literatures that this paper engages in. While the question itself is about the relationship between media-suppressive governments and media groups, the answer lies on an understanding of state-business relations, which will form the main theoretical basis of this study. The ongoing debates in this realm are presented under the broad heading of the "state autonomy debate." Additionally, the answer to the question at hand contributes to the scholarship on the political economy of media, particularly on the implications of corporate domination of media. Therefore the literature review will also summarize key findings of the political economy of media scholarship. Following the literature review, I will present my argument and hypothesis and my research design. The argument here is based on a comparative case analysis of Turkey and Venezuela under Erdogan and Chavez, respectively. The cases show variation in both the dependent and the independent

variable, and therefore provide adequate grounds for fruitful process tracing. In Turkey we observe successful suppression of the media, where the economic elites support the government in its economic achievements and wish to sustain the regime, whereas in Venezuela the government and elites have had a very uneasy relationship and the oppositional media has not relented for it has continued elite support. I present the cases and the lead-up to the suppression in Turkey first, then lay out the periods of intensified conflict between the government and the press in Venezuela, and show that despite its best efforts, the government could not succeed in suppressing the media. In concluding the empirical results section, I analyze the cases together with more attention devoted to government-business relations. Finally, I discuss my findings and what to make of them, and offer suggestions for further research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will present, and critically engage with, some of the possible answers to the question of media-elite relations. I will also suggest that a basic political economy of media approach is not adequate for understanding the mechanisms, unless it engages with the issue of state autonomy. When elites conflict with publishers and editors over content, they cannot be conceived of as a single entity acting in a consistent manner. The interests and demands of political and economic elites need to be identified and their influence observed as such. Thus, I will present some of the prevalent and contending understandings of state autonomy, on which basis I will then advance my argument for this study.

For a deeper political-economic theorization of state-media relations, we can benefit from the insights offered by the state-autonomy debate. Broadly conceived, the debate around the state can be said to take place between three pillars: those who attribute no autonomy to the state, relative autonomy theorists, and those who assert the potentially broad autonomy of the state.<sup>1</sup> The first camp, the ‘instrumentalist theory of the state,’ maintains that the state is merely an expression of class interests, a tool at the hands of the economic elites (deriving ultimately from Marx and Engels 1848). However, developments such as the welfare state, taxes, trade controls, which are at face contrary to the immediate interests of capitalists, have led scholars to move away from the instrumentalist perspective and towards a conceptualization that allows for a relative autonomous position for the state. Relative autonomy theorists agree that the state is in fact susceptible to domination by elite interests, however disagree over a) the extent of the autonomy, and b) the mechanisms and sources of that autonomy. According to this branch of theory, relative autonomy implies that the state will be able to act contrary to elite interests in the

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<sup>1</sup> The broad characterization of the state autonomy debate as explained in this paragraph draws on Poulantzas (1969), Miliband (1970), Offe (1984), and Block (1987). The individual arguments put forth by these authors will be presented at greater length later on in this section.

short run, while aiming to preserve the hegemony of one class over all others. It will be able to act against particular interests of one fraction of capital in order to maintain the stability and welfare of the entire system. This implies that state managers will have a coherent and rational understanding of what is good for the system as a whole, as well as what is necessary for the governability of a society. It is in light of these considerations that relative autonomy recognizes that states grant concessions to lower classes in the form of welfare state benefits, and also protect and foster economic growth and development by interfering in markets even if it is at the expense of short-term profits. A second implication that follows concerns the different time horizons of politicians and economic elites: by this token, politicians have a considerably lengthier time horizon than capitalists, whereas business interests for the most part tend to be myopic.

State managers recognize and act according to these considerations by way of three factors, resulting in different levels of autonomy. Some have emphasized the biographical specificity of politicians. Those who are able to rise in the ladders of political office often come from elite backgrounds, thus are biased towards elite interests. A corollary of this line of reasoning concludes that even when the state managers are themselves not of elite background, they still move in the same social circles with elites. This social affinity and personal ties results in the state being biased towards elite interests (Mills 1956). While acknowledging the existence of a bias is certainly a step towards granting more autonomy to the state than instrumentalist theory allows for, these two filters still lack the explanatory mechanism of a structural understanding of the state's position vis-à-vis the elites (Poulantzas 1969; Miliband 1970; Block 1987). As Poulantzas (1969) notes in his critique of the emphasis on state managers and their personal relationships, "the direct participation of the members of the ruling class in the State

apparatus is not the *cause* but the *effect*, and moreover a chance and contingent one, of the objective coincidence [of the interests of the ruling classes and the State's functions]" (73). The last, and arguably the most important factor, for the state's dependence on and responsiveness to elite interests stems from the need of every state to preside over some acceptable level of economic activity, in terms of employment, profitability and growth. This explanation for a bias towards elite interests can both account for the structural mechanisms for such a relationship, and take into account the leeway with which states can act contrary to those interests at times. According to its proponents, the need for every state to keep economic activity above a certain minimum is due to the needs of the state to finance itself through tax revenue and maintain credibility in international borrowing markets, as well as the politicians' desire for reelection, which depends considerably on avoiding a backlash from the electorate due to languishing economic performance (Offe 1984; Block 1987). By virtue of their control over investment, capitalists have a de facto *veto power* over policies and also governments. Hence, the state managers' structurally determined responsiveness to capitalists' interests. The private investment decisions of capitalists arm them with a de facto veto power over any government that is perceived as threatening business confidence (Block 1987). However, even though the mechanisms of the relationship between economic elites and state managers are preordained, they cannot be exposed as such, for the political system in a democracy at least needs to preserve the appearance of actually being democratic, neutral, and accountable to everyone and not merely a handful of business interests. Therefore, the state's incentive for reproducing itself while maintaining its legitimacy also contributes to its autonomy from direct and immediate control by capitalists (Offe 1984).

Another school of thought, which examines state-society relations, maintains that the state can be *potentially* autonomous from surrounding interests – that is, when the legal, administrative and coercive apparatus is strong enough to detach its activities from pressure groups (Skocpol 1979). By the same token, a previously strong state can be rendered weak, and thereby more susceptible to losing its autonomy altogether. Administrative capacity, prior public planning, and practical knowledge on the part of the governmental all mediate and co-determine the state's capacity and potential for autonomy. Therefore, on a scale of strong to weak, a government can be fully autonomous or completely dependent (Skocpol 1985, Skocpol and Finegold 1982). Furthermore, the weakness or the strength of state is not only structurally determined, but also historically specific. Due to changing societal relations, external crises to the system, or any other political factor for that matter, a branch of government might gain strength in an otherwise weak state, a strong state can crumble, and so on. In the introduction to the book *Bringing the State Back In*, intended as a critique of Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of the state and a defense of the strong state argument, Skocpol explains as follows: “State autonomy is not a fixed structural feature of any governmental system. It can come and go. (...) Structural potentials change over time, as the organizations of coercion and administration undergo transformations, both internally and in their relations to societal groups and governmental representatives” (Skocpol 1985, 14).

In a similar vein, C. Wright Mills (1956) maintains that power is exercised by those with resources, meaning those who control the firms, especially the media as it pertains to the reproduction of ideology. However, distinguishing him from the variants of state theory discussed earlier and aligning him more closely with the potential autonomy of the state school, Mills argues that those with direct access to state power, primarily bureaucrats and military



officers, also command considerable power over state affairs. He suggests that those with political power pursue wealth, as those with wealth strive for political power. Based on a tripartite division of power comprised of corporate, governmental, and military elites, Mills concludes that just as the state will reflect the interests of economic elites, so it will exert pressure upon those elites where political priorities are at stake (Mills 1956). While this project primarily aims at determining to what extent we can understand the relationship between government apparatuses aiming to suppress an overwhelmingly corporate dominated media through the insights provided by the relative autonomy of the state approach, contending arguments as advanced by Skocpol and Mills need to be critically evaluated in order to reach a conclusion with greater confidence. Both the strong state argument and the tripartite poles of power are referenced frequently with respect to state-media-military relations in Turkey and Venezuela, and will therefore be relevant to the analysis undertaken in this project.

Regardless of which variant of state theory one adheres to, one thing remains clear: corporate interests/elites have considerable influence over the political system. Having established this, we can move to the media more specifically and a leading theorization of the topic, the “propaganda model,” which seeks to explain how the political system, under elite influence, generates consent, and in attempting to do so shapes the content of information available to the public. Developed by Herman and Chomsky (1988), the propaganda model focuses on five filters through which news content is mediated: corporate ownership over media, thereby a profit motive taking precedence over emphasis on news quality; advertising as the main source of revenue; dependence on *appropriate* and *reliable* sources for information drawn primarily from government and business communities’ experts; ‘flak’ as a means of discipline; and the strict adherence to the dominant ideologies of the period, which at the time of their

writing was anticommunism (Herman and Chomsky 1988). What the model shows is not how propaganda is created and disseminated, but rather how general stories of interest will be sorted through in line with powerful governmental and/or corporate interests. A famous example, referenced by state theorists and media scholars alike, is the Watergate scandal. When the media broke the news of the wiretapping and break-in plans, the argument from the “autonomous media” camp was that the press had acted against the administration due to a liberal bias on the part of the journalists, and a lack of consideration for stability, etc.

The fact that the scandal could be exposed by media organs was cited as evidence to the media’s independence from state interference. However, many point out that the fact that the media had exposed the scandal is not a function of their independence from pressure, but rather of the fact that the attacked Democratic Party offices “represents powerful domestic interests, solidly based in the business community (...) [and these] powerful groups are capable of defending themselves, not surprisingly; and by media standards, it is a scandal when their position and rights are threatened” (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 299-300). Furthermore, the events surrounding Watergate have been of interest to debates over the state, with arguments over whether it was expression of a feud between fractions of the business community, or whether the falling out was along the business-administration lines, and scholars have called for a reevaluation of the theories based more concretely in empirical work (Block 1987; Miliband 1970). Irrespective of the mechanisms that enabled the exposure of the attack on the Democratic Party, Chomsky and Herman argue that the propaganda model still played out as expected. As the Watergate events came to light, concurrently it was revealed that the FBI had been vandalizing the offices and disrupting the activities of the Socialist Workers Party, a legal political party. However, news of this breach was not publicized as with Watergate, and there

were no political repercussions comparable to that of the Senate hearings surrounding Watergate (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 299).

While the propaganda model can accurately predict the direction of the media bias and explain the reflection of the symbiotic relationship between the interests of economic elites and the state in news media, there is still considerable room for extending its application. Firstly, the propaganda model does not take into account instances where the media contributes to the fabrication of stories specifically intended to destabilize regimes, by initiatives from domestic elites. Such an angle on business-media-government relationship would be particularly instructive for the purposes of this project, for it has been experienced repeatedly by the Turkish and Venezuelan regimes over the past two decades. Furthermore, the propaganda model does not consider whether or when the media's selective practices would or could be directed against the state in the case of elite conflict with the state. The mechanisms of that conflict and the determinants of its outcome are what I intend to study by this comparison. This study will therefore enable me not only to contribute to the empirical work around the state autonomy debate, but also expand on previous work on the media and widen the theory's application.

An important conclusion that emerges from media studies, crucial for the underlying assumptions of this paper, is elite domination over media and its undemocratic implications. The main mechanism through which elite interests have come to dominate media and the resulting attenuation of the quality of journalism is through the concentration of media ownership. This concentration has been the result of deregulation of ownership in media, the increasing embrace of liberal market principles in state's approaches to the question of regulation, and the concerns emerging from having to operate in a capitalist economy, that is concerns over costs and bottom-lines, and more importantly having to secure income from advertisements (Baker 2006; Herman

and Chomsky 1988). However, for the purposes of this paper the structural mechanisms and policy debates around ownership concentration are not as relevant as is the fact of ownership, and more importantly its consequences. McChesney (2008) analyzes the historical trajectory of this phenomenon at great length, arguing that the professional journalism and values such as objectivity and neutrality can also be traced back to the process of ownership concentration. According to McChesney, until the Gilded Age “the logic of newspaper publishing [was] primarily political [rather than] primarily commercial” (Ibid, 27). However, as market pressures intensified and ownership came to be concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few and the plethora of newspapers associated with different political parties and movements began dying down, the class interests of the elites as expressed crudely in the newspapers became obvious. Whereas such a bias would normally be expected, and even accepted, when a myriad of newspapers representing different opinions existed, it created a legitimacy crisis for the press by the twentieth century (Ibid, 27-28). It was from this crisis that standards of objective and neutral reporting arose, as an attempt to cover the elite bias of which mainstream media was under the control of. According to McChesney (2008) by opting to tackle the crisis this was, the elites effectively chose to “sacrifice their explicit political power to lock in their economic position” (29). The supremacy of economic concerns over political ones for elites means that when confronted with a choice between the two they will opt to preserve and advance their economic interests over others. Therefore it is perfectly reasonable to assume, as I do in this paper, that elites do not have any immediate and intrinsic interest in freedom of speech and expression and will concede them for their economic interests. It is this conclusion that is of fundamental importance for the argument put forth in the following sections.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

In this project I seek to examine under what conditions media executives consent to the government's application of its institutional and judicial powers and when they resist the government's efforts to do so. I argue that the potential success of repression attempts by the government depends on whether domestic elites support the government's broader political and economic project. I should note that the argument here concerns a relatively specific type of government - if democratic norms are firmly consolidated, or if the government has autocratic control over the media, then the independent influence of media owners on news content is less relevant. Therefore, the argument is limited to governments where there is some level of democratic governance whether it be limited to only the presence of free and fair elections, and can be more adequately described as illiberal democracy based on strong, personalistic rule. In those instances, it is when the government enjoys support from domestic capitalists, even implicitly, that it will have the necessary relative autonomy, as explained in the debate over the state in the previous section, to go against and suppress important corporate interests in the media sector. In these instances, the remaining members of the ruling classes will refrain from engaging the government in a conflict, forfeit the freedom of the press, thereby both appeasing the government in its wishes for convenience and compliance, while at the same time ensuring the stability and continuation of the broader political and/or economic project with which they are in agreement. On the other hand, when domestic elites do not support the government in its political and economic ambitions, they will not sacrifice oppositional media outlets that easily, and will actively organize, abet, and fund the incipient political opposition, in an attempt to destabilize the regime. As has been explained in the previous section, capitalists have effective veto power over governments or policies that they see as inimical to their interests by virtue of

their control of investment. However, more often than not an investment strike is likely to be a last resort, as it can mean significant financial costs for the capitalists as well.<sup>2</sup> If the end goal is to destabilize a government and bring about its overturn, that might be accomplished primarily and without much trouble, by shattering its electoral support, to influence public opinion in an unfavorable direction for the government. Control over the media, news content, and framing can be essential tools in such an endeavor. Therefore, I argue that when domestic business does not support the government, the latter's attempts at repressing the media will fail, as dissenting voices will continuously resurface because elite backing makes this financially and politically possible. A corollary of this argument is the assumption that elites have no intrinsic and immediate interest in freedom of thought and expression. This claim will be evaluated more theoretically than empirically, since it is not the main causal mechanism, as will be seen, required to answer the present research question. For the purposes of this argument, I am concerned more with the effectiveness of government's suppression attempts rather than the repressive measures employed by governments as such. The most commonly accepted definition of government suppression of media maintains that the *threat* of repression is an infringement on freedom of speech and expression.<sup>3</sup> However since the cases that this paper deals with both use the threat of repression extensively, I judge a successful media suppression by the results the threat of repression yields, and that is a compliance for the government's wishes in the long term.

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, in Venezuela capitalists did try and organize an investment strike in the oil industry, which was one of the most crucial episodes between the struggle between the government and its opponents in privately owned media.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most famous cases to this effect is a European Court of Human Rights verdict on the case of *Lingens v. Austria* (1986), where ECHR found Austria to be encroaching on the journalist Peter Michael Lingens' freedom of expression, when he was sentenced to pay monetary fines to the then Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky for an editorial in which Lingens characterizes Kreisky as "undignified, immoral and opportunist."

Based on the argument above, the regime's ability to suppress the media is my dependent variable and the domestic capitalists' support for the regime is the independent variable. In cases where the elites oppose the regime only in words, while implicitly supporting the regime's greater political and economic project, the state will succeed in its attempts to control the media and suppress any unfavorable content. In those cases, I expect to find that elites will not be engaged in any meaningful oppositional activity in deeds. A corresponding hypothesis maintains that when the regime does not have elite backing, elite oppositional activity will not be merely nominal; rather they will be an active part of the incipient opposition through organizing and funding efforts. Such efforts can include continuing financial support for oppositional media in the face of government sanctions, to organize as a class and employ whatever leverage they have by virtue of their class position, and so on. Again, the reasoning here follows the explanations given above: the structurally advantaged position of businesses in capitalists economy entitles them to a veto power over a government or policies, which in turn makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for governments to sustain themselves in the face of animosity from business elites. So if elites are truly in opposition to the government, we should see material evidence of it, not merely expressions of dissent remaining only in words. In those cases, repression of the media will be unsuccessful, oppositional media will remain active and not yield. In those cases, we will observe elites not relinquishing freedom of speech publicly, for they are not interested in preserving the stability or the sustenance of the government. However, in cases where they do support the government, they will have an interest in preserving it and therefore will choose to accede to its demands for silence in the public sphere, thereby making a successful media repression possible. We can expect to observe the elite's decision on the matter by their

employment preferences (whether, and if so which, journalists are hired and fired with an observable trend) and the content of coverage.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to evaluate my hypotheses that successful media repression is a function of elite support for the regime, I will use a comparative case study approach focused on process tracing. For the purposes of a more informative analysis, the cases in question should be democracies, at least nominally. The means by which truly authoritarian regimes can repress media is more immediately apparent, since the means of repression, monitoring, and control at an authoritarian regime's disposal are significantly different from those at work in a democracy. It is less clear, and therefore more intriguing, how democracies can successfully co-opt the supposedly institutionalized right to freedom of speech and expression in an effective manner. There is a considerable body of scholarship that analyzes the nature of state-media relations and the processes through which the media's critical mission has been subjugated to state and elite preferences (Herman and Chomsky 1988; McChesney 1993; McChesney 2008). These accounts focus overwhelmingly on the past confrontations between oppositional media and states in Western liberal democracies. However, there is a significant lack of scholarship examining the same relation in the developing world, where these battles are arguably more overt and taking place currently. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on those cases where there is a democratically elected government and a conflict around the domestic media. In terms of democracy, I have confined myself to cases reflecting the presence of free and fair elections, as is the accepted norm for studies of regime types.

I have chosen the cases of Turkey and Venezuela under Erdogan and Chavez, respectively. The two countries provide an adequate ground for comparison for they are both similar in crucial ways yet still show variation in both the dependent and independent variable. First, contrary to a common conception, the Turkish state under Erdogan has won a decisive

victory over oppositional news publishing in the country. Aside from imprisoning the largest number of journalists worldwide, even exceeding Iran and China on this score, the Turkish state has also ensured that news media does not challenge Erdogan and his government to the extent of its abilities, as will be shown below (“Turkey’s Press Freedom Crisis” 2012). In contrast, in Venezuela, despite the Chavez administration’s best efforts, the oppositional media not only remained in existence, but also maintained a high level of activity and prominence. Despite being under pressure from the government, the media continued to participate as a force of the opposition, at times even fostering and organizing it, at important political turns. This variation in the success of suppression of the press, I believe, is due to the different attitudes the two country’s elites have towards their respective governments. Even though the economic elite in Turkey may be of a different and likely even contradictory background to the base of Erdogan’s political movement culturally and socially, they are confident and fully supportive of the economically liberal policies of Erdogan. Therefore, since the elites support the broader economic project of the AKP government, they have opted to concede to Erdogan’s moves for the suppression of oppositional opinions. However, in Venezuela the elite of the country were in no way allied with, or even supportive of, the broader political and economic agenda of the Chavez administration. Thus, they have not relinquished their capacity for opposition as embodied by the privately owned media, and have fueled oppositional journalism even in the face of severe costs imposed on them by the government.

Additionally, the two cases show significant similarities that can serve as control variables in my study. Both regimes are electorally and politically stable; that is the government enjoys popular support and operates without legislative or administrative constraints that would be imposed from the regular checks-and-balances mechanisms in a democracy, since in both

countries the ruling party has coopted the judiciary and rendered the political opposition uncompetitive. In both regimes, the executive branch has secured the compliance of the remaining branches. While their opponents may question the legitimacy of the two leaders' actions and of the uses of their power, their electoral legitimacy is not disputed. Reports by international NGOs consistently point to the fact that while the electoral systems may be flawed and occasional problems arise with the elections themselves, neither Chavez's nor Erdogan's electoral victories have been plausibly challenged ("Freedom in the World: Venezuela" 2001-2013; "Freedom in the World: Turkey," 2003-2012). Both leaders have their base of support in a working to lower middle class mass constituency, with strong populist tendencies, and a corresponding skepticism of the elite establishment. Yet, the political opposition in both countries is still electorally viable, with real political and ideological differences from the ruling party. Both countries have similar levels of GDP per capita, and both regimes have presided over respectable though unevenly distributed economic growth. Furthermore, both leaders have legitimate means of repression at their disposal; both countries' constitutions grant them considerable room for maneuver in repressing dissenting voices.

In order to compare and contrast I will be focusing on the following events from Turkey's and Venezuela's recent past. For demonstrating the breaking points of government-media relations in Turkey, I will closely analyze the events surrounding 1) the constitutional court case against the ruling party AKP, asking for its shut down and banning, 2) a fraud scandal that originated in Germany around a international charity organization "Deniz Feneri e.V." (Lighthouse Registered Association) and was eventually handed over to Turkish courts, implicating some of AKP's high-ranking officials. The lead-up to these two events, the media coverage during them, and the government's backlash against one of the largest media

corporations constituted the decisive moments where the government and elites had to make choices and sacrifices. Similarly, in Venezuela, I will focus my analysis on 1) the lead-up to the attempted coup against Chavez in 2002 and 2) the recall referendum of 2004 organized by the opposition. The analysis will focus on the media's role in precipitating these events, the subsequent responses from the government, and the differing ways the oppositional media bore the blows.

In order to evaluate these above-explained hypotheses I plan on approaching each case with a set of questions, the answers to which will be my measures for the degree of government repression of media as well as whether the media groups and elites resisted or accepted the repression. The questions are as follows:

1. What actions did the media take that the government wished to suppress?
2. What action did the government take in response?
3. Did the media publicly object to the government's actions? Did they resist complying with the government's wishes by anything except legal channels?
4. Did other media groups come to their aid? Did other capitalists support the repressed media?
5. Did the repressed media group continue to publish oppositional stories? Did it participate in other efforts to destabilize the regime?

Once I establish the sequence of events (Questions 1 & 2), I will be able to trace what happens with my variables through the remaining questions. If, for example, the media groups do not object publicly to the government's repression attempts, it will be a strong indicator of successful cooptation by the government. Recourse to legal channels, in and of themselves, cannot be taken as evidence of a significant resistance to repression, as they are the primary

means through which corporations protect their financial interests. More often than not, there will be monetary fines involved with the government's repression attempts, and perhaps also the possibility of imprisonment for some of the journalists involved, and in those cases it is only natural that the media groups will seek legal action and try to protect themselves. However, this is more of an act of rational self-preservation than a political resistance to the government, and is compatible with full compliance with any intended censorship; hence, by setting court cases aside I avoid the possible pitfall of inflating my observations for resistance. In this way, Question 3 will enable me to more specifically measure my dependent variable of success of government repression. The answers to Question 4 will be the operationalization of my independent variable, for they will show whether the remaining elites support the oppositional media group(s) or the government in the case of a confrontation. If it is the case that they do not come to the aid of their fellow businessmen being repressed by the government, then it is an indicator that they opt to preserve the regime's stability and projects. I will further corroborate the domestic elite's attitudes towards the regime by looking at disclosed funding sources for opposition parties, whether protest was organized, and if so funded by whom. For the Turkish case, I will also document the preemptive firings of journalists by other media groups following the government's confrontation with one group. Because I lack Spanish language skills, finding the same data for Venezuela was not possible given the time constraints on this work. Lastly, the answer to Question 5 will demonstrate whether the government's repression attempts were successful. Absent a continuation of publishing oppositional stories, we can conclude that the repression was in fact effective. In what follows, I will rely mainly on newspaper articles, public statements by the higher echelons of the governments, and reports by NGOs focusing on the

media, primarily Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and Committee to Protect Journalists.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The countries' similarities are crucial for the purposes of this study, for some of those characteristics have been identified as the cause of the government's ability to suppress the media in Turkey, such as Erdoğan's and his government's strength, a lack of strong democratic institutions, etc (Egin 2011). These explanations can also be traced back to a dominant view on the history of state-capitalist relations in Turkey. According to this view, the capitalist class was essentially "state-created" and therefore the relationship in the following years continued to reproduce this initial dynamic of the capitalist classes being dependent on the state (Bugra 1994; Keyder 1987). Thus, when it came to relations with media capitalists, the state could continue to exert its dominant role without significant resistance from the capitalist class as a whole. If, however, it was the strength and centralization of Erdoğan's rule that enabled his government to suppress the media effectively, we would expect the same outcome in Chavez's Venezuela, that is privately owned media's concession to the government's wishes for compliance. If anything, Chavez held a tighter grip on power than Erdoğan by virtue of the fact constitutional amendments allowed him to extend term limits and dismiss some administrative bodies, so his government's repression of media would be expected to be even more successful if it were only a function of state powers.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the Venezuelan government's clashes with the media are ongoing, with the latter still able to resurface in oppositional forms, whereas in Turkey mass media bosses have given in to Erdoğan's wishes for quiescence to the point that during anti-government protests across the country in the summer of 2013, none of the major news channels reported the

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted here that the countries had similar levels of press freedom at beginning of the respective governments. Freedom House ranks both countries as "partly free" for the years of 1999 and 2001 in its "Freedom in the World" index, and Reporters Without Borders places both countries in the third quartile in its "Press Freedom Index" for 2002, with Venezuela ranking 77<sup>th</sup> out of 139 countries, and Turkey ranking 99<sup>th</sup> (Freedom House 1999; 2001; Reporters Without Borders 2002). Furthermore, in both countries the media is highly concentrated (Sozeri 2013; Lupien 2013).

events for two days. It should be reiterated that this analysis does not argue that the Venezuelan government is *not* suppressing its media, rather the point is that it *cannot* do so effectively in a way that opposition does not resurface as its Turkish counterpart has succeeded in achieving.

### ***Turkey***

Following a decade of severe political and economic instability, rampant corruption and political violence, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi; hereafter AKP) assumed office in November 2002. The elections marked not only the first time an Islamist party won enough votes to form a single party government but also they crushed all but one of the major center right and left parties that had been in office and participants in coalition governments throughout the 1990s (Toprak 2012). The turbulent state of affairs that characterized the 1990s has been a benchmark against which the AKP's relative success has commonly been measured, both for the public and the business community. However, the significance of the 1990s for the purposes of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, the stability that the AKP has been able to achieve following a decade of political and economic crises has rendered the party practically indispensable for the domestic elites. On the other hand, it was during the 1990s that the seeds of resentment and hostility towards the Kemalist establishment and its embodiment in the media were planted in the ruling cadres of AKP.

Over the ten years of its rule, AKP has increased its votes steadily, now commanding half of the electorate's support. Furthermore, the party has presided over significant economic growth, extensive privatizations, a stabilization of the previously volatile exchange rates and improvement of the country's reputation in international financial markets. Accomplishing these positive economic developments alongside a rapid neoliberalization program, without triggering much popular unrest contributed to the AKP's popularity with the economic elites of the country.



However, relations between the media conglomerates and the government were uneasy due to the historical relations between the media and AKP's predecessor Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP). The media capitalists mattered not only because the owners of those conglomerates were among the largest holdings in the country, but also because investment in the media sector had been considered an important political investment rather than an economically-driven profit-oriented one (Ozturk 2010; Sozeri 2013; Sozeri and Guney 2011). AKP is the last in a long line of political parties originating out of the Islamist movement. During the fifteen years it was active, RP managed to add to its track record important electoral victories, partnership in a coalition government, and eventually being ousted by what went down in Turkish history as the "post-modern coup d'état." This coup, the forced resignation of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan of RP in February 1997, marked not only a breaking point in current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's relations with media groups, but also the explicit recognition by the Islamist political movement of a need for their own media force. Although RP did not command an electoral base as wide as that of AKP, it still represented a popular and powerful movement. The most notable sources of RP's power rested in its popularity in local politics, a fact made evident by its winning of the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara (Akinci 1999). Erdogan himself rose from those ranks, serving as the mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998, until he was arrested under the pretext of "incitement to religious and racial hatred" based on a poem recital and was consequently forced out of his mayoral post (Birand and Yildiz 2012).

The RP and its political cadres' fall from power in 1997 was not an expression of electoral dissent, but the Kemalist military's belief that they were leading the country down an anti-secularist path (Birand and Yildiz 2012). The military, together with the skeptical elements in the bureaucracy, issued a statement listing its 'concerns' for the stability of the regime and

what it saw as the dubious prospects for secularism as a principle at a National Security Council meeting (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK).<sup>5</sup> The situation was made worse when following the military's statement the Head Prosecutor of the Supreme Court filed a Constitutional Court case against the RP, charging it with having become the focal point of anti-secularist activity. In the end, PM Necmettin Erbakan acquiesced to resigning under pressure from the military and his coalition partners, the RP was disbanded with its high-ranking politicians banned from politics, one of them being the current PM Erdogan (Birand and Yildiz 2012). The process, spanning intensified demonstrations by Islamists, which were trumped up by provocative headlines leading to the military's warning statement, and eventually culminating in Erbakan's resignation, is referred to as the February 28<sup>th</sup> Process, popularly also known as the 'post-modern coup d'état'.

Besides being the military's fourth intervention in civilian politics in four decades, the February 28<sup>th</sup> Process was infamous for the media's involvement in the events leading up to the government's resignation. The military collaborated with newspapers and TV channels in exposing the fundamentalist elements in RP, allegedly sometimes even fabricating news or dictating headlines, in order to evoke a sense of distrust and fear in the public and, by extension, support for the coup. According to former media boss Cem Uzan, for example, during the period leading up to February 1997, the editor-in-chief at his newspaper Star would publish headlines with directives from the military's chief of general staff, allegedly as did others at several other

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<sup>5</sup> MGK is a body headed by the Head of the State, in his/her absence the Prime Minister. It is composed of the Army Commander General, other Army Generals and key ministries. It meets bimonthly, barring any extraordinary circumstances ("About Us: The Secretariat General of the National Security Council"). The Council was established by the military regime of 1960 in December 1962, and remains the key institution through which the army exerts its control and influence over civilian governments. The Council's main purpose is identified as coordinating the institutions concerned with national security, however, the definition is broad enough for the army to identify any issue of its choosing as a matter of national security. In the case of the events described in this paper, the involvement of Islamists in politics was considered an example of a 'national security threat.'

media groups (Ozay 2013). Nowadays, accounts of former media bosses, politicians, and journalists placing the blame on one another are bountiful, since the parliament has taken to investigate the coup attempt of February 28<sup>th</sup>, however the historical record only confirms that all main press outlets had a part to play in the alleged crimes. One of the most egregious example of the headlines read “With Guns If Necessary,” an excerpt from a military briefing that has commonly been referred to by the period’s politicians as contributing to the preparation of public opinion for the upcoming coup (Birand and Yildiz 2012, 233). The way that media groups aligned behind the military against the Islamist government resulted in the latter’s resentment towards mainstream media, and a need for a press that would be loyal to their cause.<sup>6</sup>

As the successor of RP, and having witnessed its fate, AKP began its political career from a more moderate position, its cadres claiming it to be a “socially conservative and moderately Islamist” political party that had abandoned the “national vision” (Milli Görüş), the term used for the previous movement’s religious ideology (Toprak 2012; Yuksek 2003). Being able to transcend the conventional Islamist-secularist divide during its campaign, AKP was elected into office in November 2002 with 34% of the votes, significantly higher than its predecessors received at the peak of their popularity (Champion 2012; Toprak 2012). However, statements by other members of AKP that contradicted the party’s claims for moving to a more moderate position continued to fuel the Kemalists’ fears and suspicions (*Milliyet*, 22 May 2003). Furthermore, in addition to the polarization that was building up in the society, Erdogan and AKP had inherited a country barely coming out of an economic crisis, with overwhelming debt, and a decade of political turmoil. However, that turmoil seemed to have worked to AKP’s

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<sup>6</sup> At this point the Islamists owned a small newspaper, *Milli Gazete*, with negligible circulation. With investment from Islamist businesses and their remaining strength and control in the municipalities, the Islamist movement was able to establish Kanal7 and Yeni Safak, a TV station and a newspaper respectively. The establishment and funding of Kanal7 relates to the Deniz Feneri e.V. corruption scandal that will be discussed later in the paper.

benefit in a sense, for mistrust in the political system was so widespread in the public, all but two of eighteen competing parties could not pass the 10% electoral threshold. Therefore the 34% of the national vote that AKP won in the elections translated in to half of the seats in the parliament. With that majority and the absence of a significant opposition, AKP could effectively push through the structural adjustment plans prescribed by the IMF. The government's ability to implement neoliberal reforms and structural adjustment appeased the business community greatly. Already during AKP's first term in office, the Turkish economy grew by an average of 6.9% annually between 2003-2007 ("Data: World Development Indicators").

Amidst wide praise for his government's economic success, Erdogan and AKP won their second election in July 2007 with a landslide victory of 46%. Yet, the tension between the Islamist and secularist camps was escalating, and it culminated in March 2008 in a lawsuit filed by the Head Prosecutor of the Supreme Court with the Constitutional Court asking for the AKP to be disbanded and the banning of 71 of its politicians from politics for five years, including PM Erdogan and Head of State Abdullah Gul (Bianet, 17 March 2008). The prosecution claimed that AKP had become the focal point of anti-secularist activity in Turkey, which is an offense against the secularism clause in the constitution. Erdogan and his comrades, having witnessed the disbanding of a long line of political parties in the movement they were a part of, chose to keep as much of a low-profile as possible, since they knew full-well that the Kemalist establishment in the state was not only inimical to them, but also capable of mobilizing powerful groups such as the military (Toprak 2012). Consequently, at this stage there was no overt intervention by the government towards the media, even though the circumstances intensified the government's distrust of the media. In particular, the prosecutor's case was made up almost completely of news articles, editorials, and scattered pieces of news published mainly in two newspapers, Hurriyet

and Milliyet, belonging to Dogan Media Group. The evidence file was overwhelmingly comprised of news pieces; the case came to be called the “Google File” initially by the AKP’s official reply to the indictment, as was also later embraced by the public, implying that the prosecutor had googled “AKP” and printed out everything that came up (*T24*, 17 September 2008). This contributed significantly to Erdogan’s wishes to censor the mainstream media, which he viewed as inherently opposed to him and his political party.

The Constitutional Court, in the end, ruled against disbanding the party by six to five votes but issued a fine to AKP; in effect, it meant that the Court did indeed find the party guilty of the said activity but the evidence was not enough for disbanding it (*Milliyet*, 30 July 2008). Alongside these developments, the bankruptcy of the owner of one of the three main newspapers in the country, Sabah, presented the pro-Erdogan camp with a window of opportunity to create a solidly supportive wing of the press. In a bidding process, capitalist linked to Islamist politics, Ahmet Calik, purchased Sabah Media Group and began establishing the pro-government media.<sup>7</sup> While at this point the Erdogan government’s uneasy relationship with the media was evolving, he did yet not engage the media groups in an overt conflict. I believe this is due to Erdogan’s more pragmatic nature, for after having seen a series of political parties being shut down by Constitutional Court pleas, Erdogan and his fellow reformist cadres who founded the AKP did not want to engage the secularist bureaucracy and the forces that aligned with it only a decade earlier during the post modern coup d’état openly and aggressively. Admittedly, until first-hand accounts of the AKP years become available to the public, my reading of Erdogan’s behavior is

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<sup>7</sup> The sale of Sabah to Calik holding aroused significant controversy, for through Erdogan’s and Head of State Abdullah Gul’s personal involvement Calik was provided with credit from the Qatar Investment Authority, with the Emir of which Erdogan and Gul have a close and personal relationship. Additionally, the fact that the new press would be completely pro-government was further made evident with Calik’s personal ties to Erdogan, whose son-in-law is Calik Holding’s CEO (Berat Albayrak, Erdogan’s son-in-law has recently announced that he will be leaving his duties at Calik Holding by the end of December 2013, (*Radikal*, 21 November 2013)).

more speculation than anything else, however I believe that previous accounts of Erdogan and the former RP cadres during both the disbanding of RP and Erdogan's imprisonment provide ample ground for one to read pragmatism into Erdogan's behavior during the 2007-2008 AKP's disbanding trials (Birand and Yildiz 2012).

The last straw for the Erdogan-mainstream media relations came when the Dogan Media Group publicized a corruption case being tried in Germany in September 2008. The corruption scandal erupted when the German branch of Deniz Feneri e.V., an NGO working in humanitarian aid, food, and shelter assistance both in Turkey and also internationally, was found to be scamming the donors. According to the German court's findings, 41 million Euros gathered by the association were being used for purposes other than the organization had declared to donors. While the association's managers were sentenced to prison in Germany, the chief prosecutor of the high court in Frankfurt said that the main perpetrators of the scheme were in Turkey, where the lost money also traced back to, and handed the file over to Turkish courts for further prosecutions. The German court's findings implicated those very close to the Erdogan government (*Hurriyet*, 16 September 2008). DMG, who publicized the corruption case and these connections, became target of Erdogan's war on media, where he called on his supporters publicly at a rally to "boycott these media groups" (CNNTurk, 14 February 2009).

Much more determined to establish a silence in the public sphere about anything that could threaten the government, Erdogan's actions were significantly more decisive than mere calls for a boycott. A couple of weeks after the stories appeared in the press, tax inspectors flooded the Dogan Media Group head quarters, issuing a fine to Aydin Dogan for underpaid taxes in a recent merger with the Springer Group. DMG was obliged to pay 826 million Turkish Liras in February 2009, and in September of the same year a second fine of 2.5 billion USD was

handed out to the company. In order to demonstrate the exorbitance of the tax fines, Egin (2011) points to the following comparison: according to Forbes Magazine's annual "Richest 100" list, the wealthiest man in Turkey, Husnu Ozyegin has \$2.9 billion. Aydin Dogan, owner of Dogan Media Group, has a personal wealth of \$750 million, ranking 23<sup>rd</sup> in Turkey. Dogan had to sell off two of his newspapers (Milliyet and Vatan), one TV channel (Star TV), and his business in the energy sector, Petrol Ofisi A.Ş (Egin 2011). Aydin Dogan's fate set the example for the remaining bosses in the media sector. Despite his best efforts, Dogan was unable to garner the support of his fellow business owners. Dogus Media Group, the owner of the respected news channel NTV, preemptively terminated the contracts of six of its dissident journalists rather than supporting Dogan in its opposition to the government (*Radikal*, 29 July 2011). While it is not surprising that the other media groups did not take the risk of openly backing Dogan at the time, they had a record of cooperating to achieve political ends, such as they did during the February 28<sup>th</sup> Process only fifteen years earlier (Birand and Yildiz 2012; Hakan 2012). Because the groups reined in their own journalists, they adopted the intention not to challenge the government singly or collectively.

This trend of firing journalists and suppressing important news stories has become the rule in the Turkish media following Erdogan's confrontation with Dogan Media. In December 2011, when the Turkish military, acting on intelligence it received from the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT), fired on 34 civilian smugglers moving between the Turkish-Iraqi border based on information that the Kurdish guerilla organization PKK's second in command was among them, the media did not report the incident until an official statement was made by the government. In the eighteen or so hours that elapsed between the killing and the media reports, the incident was only reported by the independent Kurdish media

through two websites. Although both the privately owned mainstream media and the state owned television network have the necessary manpower on the ground to corroborate such a story and begin reporting, they delayed reporting, seemingly in order not to anger the government. The news of the massacre only appeared on these television networks and news websites after an official statement had been made and the government could therefore control the tone and the pace of the crisis. Similarly, when in 2013 the country was shaken with widespread protests in the city center of Istanbul, where the protestors and the police were clashing intensively, none of the newspapers or the television networks reported the protests for two days. The non-reporting in the Turkish media became such an obvious travesty at one point that CNN Turkey was broadcasting a documentary on penguins for two evenings following the news hour; while CNN International was reporting live from Istanbul. Only once it was clear that the protests were not dying down and the government was addressing the protestors, did the mainstream media begin reporting on the goings-on in the country. The ensuing coverage was lengthy and at the center of attention, for the protests did not die down for weeks and spread to other cities. However, once the government got back in control of the situation, it again reminded the media of its wishes for silence. Receptive bosses consequently fired oppositional voices in their companies, and according to one account 80 journalists ended up unemployed in the aftermath of Gezi protests (Ocak 2013). These two instances of self-censorship by the media are crucial in demonstrating the silence that Erdogan has succeeded in obtaining from media bosses. Since Erdogan has the capacity to retaliate against individual media groups, and often does so through personalizing his verbal attacks, the business owners in the media sector do not organize as a class, but rather react to the threat of repression as individual groups. If the Turkish media were to organize itself as a sector, it would have to oppose Erdogan politically and economically, which they have not yet



showed the willingness for. The result has been the curtailment not only of a politically oppositional media, in the sense of criticizing the government wherever possible, but media as a forum and provider of news and information with which the public understands and reacts to the government. The most crucial function of any journalism, let alone oppositional writing, is informing the public, and the Turkish media has failed to do so in a reliable and timely manner in a massacre and a popular uprising.

Recently, in the aftermath of a graft probe that involved three ministers' sons while also implicating Erdogan's own son, the news media in Turkey has not reported on tape recordings of Erdogan's conversations with media bosses, businessmen, and many more. While these incidents were reported on extensively in the international press, by respected media outlets such as CNN, New York Times, Guardian, BBC, they were only able to make it to the pages of marginal papers.<sup>8</sup> So, it emerges from these three major political events, which would keep any European democracy and press occupied for months, the Turkish media has failed to perform its most basic duty, that of informing the public. In all three cases, the media has consciously chosen to avoid content that would be upsetting to Erdogan's government. That newspapers have let go off their most basic function at crucial times of political crises is testament to the effectiveness of the Erdogan government's suppression. Such compliance by the media has not been obtained in the other case, that of Venezuela.

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<sup>8</sup> The newspapers in question are Sözcü, Cumhuriyet, Aydınlık, Zaman and T24. While Zaman enjoys a relatively higher circulation compared to the rest, because of its ideological affiliation with the Islamist Gulen sect, it is still marginal in its readership. Similarly, Cumhuriyet is one of the longest lasting publications of the Turkish media, however due to its Kemalist ideology, it can only reach a limited audience who share its ideological commitments. Of the remaining ones, T24 is more widely accessed, however it is an online paper, and is therefore again limited in its readership or the effect it has on public opinion.

## **Venezuela**

One-time Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez, who launched an unsuccessful coup in 1992 and was briefly imprisoned, ultimately returned to be elected president with overwhelming popular support in 1998, winning 57% of the votes. As with the elections that put Erdogan in power in Turkey, this electoral conjuncture in Venezuela was one that immediately followed a decade of a political regime turbulence, wracked with corruption and a deep economic crisis, ultimately resulting in widespread disillusionment with the existing political parties. However, in a country with severe inequality and a political system that catered to the interests of the elites, Chavez's social and economic justice platform backed with the support of the lower classes, was not welcome by the elites fearing redistribution and potential expropriation because of Chavez's leftist politics. In fact, following Chavez's election, capital flight from Venezuela for 1999 was estimated to be around \$8 billion, while the economy shrank by 7.2% (Freedom House 2001). The uneasy relationship between Chavez and the privately owned media, which has served as the primary means of organizing the opposition, can be traced back to the campaigning period before the 1998 elections. In Chavez's own characterization related in various interviews, the media groups owned by anti-Chavez businesses did not offer him a chance to make a public appeal and did not include him as part of the candidate debates in the lead-up to the election, in effect trying to censor his political message from the coverage available to voters (Guevara 2005; Harnecker 2005). According to Chavez, the privately owned media suppressed his message in order to target the middle-class and the intelligentsia, who by virtue of their social and economic interests would have been the swing voters in a contest between Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement (Movimiento V Republica, MVR) and the oppositional right-wing candidates (Harnecker 2005, 138). According to Dinneen (2012), the media assumed the role of the political opposition

against Chavez once the traditional center-right parties in the country, Accion Democratic and COPEI, had lost their legitimacy and electoral viability. The media as a consequence became the personification of that opposition to such an extent that, “by 2000, nine out of the ten major daily newspapers and all five big commercial television companies effectively formed an anti-Chávez bloc, collaborating between them in order to coordinate their campaign” (Dinneen 2012, 34).

### **Coup Attempt of 2002**

Within two years in office, Chavez strengthened his rule in the country considerably. In July of 2000, he was reelected to the presidency with almost 60% of the vote. Following the elections, the Chavez administration proposed a series of constitutional reforms in a referendum, which the opposition claimed were stepping stones for Chavez to stay in power for the next decade and further curb democratic rights (Freedom House 2002). Following the referendum, the congress and the national assembly were dismissed in line with the amendments proposed by the Chavez administration and measures were taken instituting effective censorship of the press. Conceivably in order to curb the privately owned media’s fierce criticisms of its actions, the government passed an article in the Constituent Assembly requiring “journalists to publish or broadcast truthful information” (Freedom House 2001). The elite opposition perceived that the Chavez government was increasing both its institutional strength as well as its popular support and moved to destabilize the regime more fundamentally. In particular, Chavez’s Empowerment Law enabled the government to halt the privatizations of national industries such as oil and aluminum, begun by previous administrations, and thereby greatly threatened the interests of the economic elites (Guevara 2005). Following a national strike against Chavez organized by the political opposition and big business in December 2001, the opposition moved to organize a coup d’état against the government in April 2002.

Reminiscent of the protests against the Allende government in Chile in the early 1970s, the opposition in April 2002 organized a “pots and pans march” in Caracas. This coincided with a shutdown of the state oil company and a general strike among sympathizers. The media’s role in precipitating these events was crucial, at least as far as the government was concerned. Adding to the tensions already existing between private media and the Chavez administration, the government took the private media’s coverage of the events as further evidence of their animosity. In the words of the then Minister of Defense Jorge Garcia Carneiro, at the time of the coup attempt the mainstream media was as acting as if they were a political party, and exceeding the limits of their informing the public function (Guevara 2005, 127). When the anti-Chavez forces of the military initiated the coup, Chavez reports that false accounts of him having resigned were circulating the news. Although he tried to make a broadcast alerting the public that he had not in fact resigned, privately owned television stations that were oriented against the government would not air the news, and the public television could not relay his message because it had been taken over by pro-coup forces. According to Chavez, it took almost two days before news that he was still fighting to stay in office reached the people, who then took to the streets to clash with the anti-government civilian and military forces.

A provisional government convened for 19 days, while Chavez was held by the forces in the military behind the coup. Chavez regained control toward the end of April 2002. The coup attempt was a decisive turning point in government-media relations, for it not only reminded the regime that big business and its representatives in the media could not only withhold support, but also were willing to actively seek out alternative forces and extreme measures, such as a coup, to destabilize and hopefully rid themselves of the government. Chavez later reflected in an

interview that the coup attempt had changed him and his ruling style dramatically (Guevara 2005, 57):

“It is clear that my willingness prior to April 11 to be flexible over and over again gave rise to or allowed a number of events to unfold. (...) Now, for example, I could try to close down the TV channels [that backed the coup], even though I might fail in the attempt. But I have promised myself that if this opposition, this counterrevolution, this fascism, were to be unleashed again, I would not allow my country, our country, to be driven to the edge of the abyss, as it was on April 11.”

As can be inferred from this passage, Chavez’s government following the coup clearly placed most of the blame for the coup on the media networks, and intended to confront them, but was clearly aware of the possibility that he might not succeed. One way that Chavez sought to level the balance of power in the media was by exerting greater control over the government owned TV station, by interrupting programs, soap operas, even sports games for the broadcast of his speeches and other pro-regime materials (Freedom House 2003).

### **General Strike and Recall Referendum of 2003-2004**

After having failed in the attempted coup, the opposition directed their energies toward a general strike in February 2003, which ultimately lasted 62 days but still failed to secure Chavez’s resignation. Although it failed to force the government out of office, it had the effect of crippling the oil industry. Once it was clear that the strike was coming to an end without having achieved the opposition’s goals, the opposition began organizing for a recall referendum. The referendum took place in August 2004, and Chavez won 58% of the vote. In the meantime, the Chavez administration instituted new restrictive legislation, concerning journalism and the work of journalists in July 2004, which imposed bureaucratic duties on journalists regulating their educational backgrounds and requiring them to register formally with the state (Freedom House 2005). Furthermore, in line with his previous statements on having ‘radicalized’ his attitude

towards the mainstream media, the Chavez government promulgated another law in December 2004, entitled “The Law on the Social Responsibility of Radio and Television,” which maintained that as part of their social responsibility to the public, radio and TV stations should not air violent content during prime time. According to the critics, this clause would be effectively censor important political news and the shortcomings of the government, as news programs would have to be scheduled after 10 p.m. to cover the stories of violent crime that dominate news coverage in Venezuela. The allegation of irresponsible coverage of violence would emerge not long after, as will be seen, in Globovision’s coverage of prison rioting.

It is important to note, that after six years in office with his electoral support at a steady 60%, the Chavez government was still trying to pressure the media through its legal and coercive capacities. Erdogan’s government in Turkey, on the other hand, in six years had received no more than 48% of the vote and was facing comparable hostility from the military, yet it had gone so far as to impose crippling fines that economically forced the media groups into submission. Since methods of economic coercion are not a state secret available only to the Turkish government, it is interesting to consider why Chavez refrained from such action and instead sought to suppress the media through legislative means only. In fact, Chavez did resort to more decisive actions shortly thereafter, in 2007 and subsequently. Turning now to the contestations between Chavez and the mainstream media in Venezuela, it will be seen that even when Chavez took powerful economic measures to suppress the media, he could not do so as effectively as Erdogan’s government. The reason for this lies mainly with the lack of support that Chavez enjoyed with the country’s economic elite, who therefore continued to support oppositional media, and made it possible for the media to keep its oppositional activities going by paying the

finances, and repeatedly reopening TV channels when they were closed by finding small technicalities and/or changing the station's name.

In December 2006, Chavez was once again reelected to office with 61% of the vote. Shortly after the reelection, on December 27, Chavez announced that the oppositional TV station RCTV's license would not be renewed because of the role it played in the coup attempt in 2002. According to this administrative move, the channel's broadcasting would end in early 2008. In May 2007, RCTV was ordered to shut down, which consequently gave rise to massive student protests throughout the country for the rest of the year. The student protests were widely publicized in the mainstream media, and soon after RCTV resumed its operations as a cable channel. A second attempt by the government to curb the privately owned media came in 2009, when Globovision, another leading voice of the opposition, suffered investigations and attacks on its headquarters. Furthermore, in July 2009 the government's National Telecommunications Commission, CONATEL, revoked the licenses of 32 radio stations. CONATEL also issued a \$2.16 million fine to Globovision, amounting to 7.5% of the company's gross income for 2010, for "excessive coverage of a prison riot 'that promoted hatred and intolerance for political reasons'" (Freedom House 2013). The fine was approved by the Supreme Court in June 2012, and was consequently paid by Globovision, yet it was not on the expropriatory level seen in Turkey. Another pillar of the Chavez government's efforts to suppress the media was through pro-Chavez forces' own attempts at gaining a foothold in the media industry. Over the course of this conflict, recognizing that they would not be able to sway the privately-owned media's oppositional stance towards the political and economic project underway by 2007, the Chavez government came to own six television stations, 400 community radios and 100 newspapers, among other ventures (Gibens 2009, 84). This division of the media into distinct pro- and anti-

government camps has been highlighted in reports of international press NGOs, drawing attention to the lack of impartiality in news in Venezuelan media (“Freedom of the Press: Venezuela” 2013; “Freedom in the World: Venezuela” 2013).

However, despite their best efforts, the Chavez administration has not succeeded in securing the degree of suppression it desires in the media. This lack of effective censorship can be illustrated by the combination of a few facts. Firstly, even though the privately owned media’s share in broadcasting might have declined over the years as some would emphasize, the government media still does not have a significant, let alone comparable, share in viewership. Research has shown that the state owned television networks command only 5.4% of the audience share, whereas 61.4% of the remaining 94.6% of the audience was watching privately owned television channels, with 33.1% watching paid TV. By this calculation, it emerges that almost 95% of Venezuelans still watch TV that is at least not-pro government if not anti-Chavez (Weisbrot and Ruttenberg 2010). In fact, according to the analysts, “much of the private media is stridently anti- government, in ways that go beyond the boundaries of what is permitted in the United States, for example” (Ibid, 1). Furthermore, as has been mentioned earlier, the government’s fines and license revoking seems to have yielded very little results since both Globovision and RCTV continued to operate, albeit with difficulty. To take the example of RCTV, although the channel’s license was revoked, it continued to broadcast the same content through cable and satellite, under the name of RCTV International, which even enabled the company to claim at one point that it was exempt from the government’s jurisdiction. Based on such technicalities the channel would not broadcast Chavez’s speeches, something that is mandated by law in Venezuela (Weisbrot and Ruttenberg 2010, 5).



### ***Comparing the Cases: Analysis***

In the previous sections, I have highlighted the nature of media-government relations, by emphasizing the political side of events through focusing on the acts of oppositional journalism by the media and the governments' attempts at suppression. As I have shown, for what might be characterized as equally sour relations between the respective governments and domestic media, the Turkish state under Erdogan has succeed in its attempts at suppression, while the Chavez administration could not secure a comparable outcome. In what follows, I will focus on the economic side of the story, namely the domestic elite's support for the regime in explaining these divergent outcomes. As I have hypothesized, I expected to find media censorship to be successfully imposed by the government where the domestic capitalists find the regime beneficial to their interests and therefore wish to see its stability ensured. In those cases where governments challenge select media capitalists with repression, the capitalist class as a whole will not challenge the government on its objectives, and forgo freedom of speech by putting pressure on the journalists under their control. On the other hand, where elites consider the regime to be inimical to their interests, they will not relinquish their oppositional capacity in the media so freely, and will continue to back the opposition not only by funding their political activities, but also through representing its standpoint in the media, and thereby more broadly fight the government's political and economic project. The trajectory of media-government relations, as demonstrated by the Turkish and Venezuelan cases confirms this expectation.

As exemplified by the Turkish case, when the Erdogan government went after Dogan Media Group, whom it blamed for the Constitutional Court case and later for exposing the corruption scandal, Dogus Media Group chose not to expose the suppressive character of the government's actions, but rather preemptively rid its own network of oppositional journalists. It

should be noted here that while I refer only to the Dogus Media group's response to what happened to Dogan, given the concentrated nature of the media in Turkey, only Dogus among the largest companies would be important. No important competitors existed that could plausibly follow in Dogus' footsteps. The largest three media companies in Turkey are Dogan, Dogus, and Calik, listed in order (Sozeri 2013), with Calik being the chief pro-government group (whose entrance into the media sector and its relationship with the government was discussed above). The fact that media resistance to Erdogan ended with Dogan's and Dogus' decision to concede to the government's demands for silence in the public sphere reflects the elite's greater support for the government; both are among the largest 25 companies (with Dogus's businesses encompassing banking, energy, and construction among others), and no other concerted opposition ever emerged from the private media (Ozturk 2010). However, we need the Venezuelan case to show the significance of a media sector that opposed the government in actions as well as words. Even though the government attempted to employ the same means of coercion while enjoying greater legal capacity for coercion as well as an executive significantly less accountable, more centralized and powerful, the PSUV government has not been able to secure similar censorship in the oppositional media. In fact, private media throughout Chavez' time in office continued to be anti-government and survived the suppression attempts. This was made possible by the elite's continued support of investment in private media, paying the fines, continuing broadcasting under different names and through different channels.

All in all, although oppositional media operates under difficult circumstances, it has managed to exist under the fourteen years of Chavez governments analyzed here, completely unlike its Turkish counterpart. Within six years, Erdogan's administration has managed to secure concessions from the once oppositional press. Relating this to the propaganda model / political

economy of the media account, if major capitalists oppose government, they will try to find the ways to use their media capital to hurt it. In Venezuela, they sought out ways, while in Turkey they did not try. Therefore, it was not the repression that stopped the Turkish media groups from acting in opposition, but the media bosses' calculation of relinquishing oppositional journalism for the benefits they stood to gain from it seemed relatively low. Whereas for Venezuelan capitalists faced with a socialist government, retaining their ability to influence public opinion against that government was a matter of life and death, in Turkey the price for business to destabilize the government would be to also destabilize the government that has been delivering sound economic growth and a booming economy. As the financial costs imposed on the media by the respective regimes were roughly equivalent, the much higher desire to oppose the government in Venezuela led them to experiment with various expedients that allowed them, in fact, to continue to support the opposition with information, coordination, and massively disseminated opinions.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have argued that when economic elites and the government of a country are in agreement over the important political and economic direction of the administration, they will accede to the government's wishes for a quiescent media. The main motive underlying an elite's choice in political confrontations is ultimately ensuring the stability and continuing of an investment-friendly environment (Block 1987; Offe and Wiesenthal 1985), where freedom of press and expression are nuisances to be discarded upon the government's wishes. On the other hand, where elites and the government are fundamentally opposed in their interests and projects, elites will not concede press freedom as easily and will continue to support oppositional journalism despite government's active efforts to suppress the media. All in all, the conclusion I have reached is that successful media suppression occurs when the government has elite backing. It also emerges from this conclusion, that freedom of the press, in and of itself, does not carry significance for economic elites, rather it is a convenient clause of democracy that can either be instrumentalized for the advancement of their own political agenda or be brushed aside when it does not serve their best interests.

I have tried to substantiate my argument by looking closely at the government-media relations in Turkey and Venezuela, two cases that share overwhelming similarities in regime type and economic indicators however vary greatly in terms of both the government's ability to suppress the oppositional press as well as elite support for the respective regimes. The analysis has confirmed my expectations. Both the Erdogan and Chavez governments have sought to limit the dissenting voices available to the public, which for them has inevitably included clashes with big businesses in the media sector. Each government has employed powerful coercive tools against the media, yet only in Venezuela has the media continued to publicize and coordinate the

political opposition. Whereas a preliminary and rather isolated confrontation with one of the country's large media enterprises has resulted in concessions by the remaining groups for Erdogan's wishes for a compliant media, the Chavez administration had to repeatedly impose coercive legal and economic measures on the opposition groups but was not able to secure acquiescence from any one of the groups. This divergence is due to the fact that the Chavez government and the political movement it comes from are inimical to business confidence, and the country's elites have been the anti-government opposition force in the country ever since Chavez assumed office. In Turkey, on the other hand, Erdogan's regime has been very business-friendly, and the business community in return has supported the government from the very beginning. The opposition in Turkey, as far as elite involvement goes, has been limited to words, emphasizing stylistic and ideological differences between the Islamist and conservative tradition that Erdogan represents and the elites' mostly Kemalist and secularist convictions, as opposed to a rejection of the regime's policies overall and an effort to back this up with actions to destabilize the government.

I have relied on process tracing for the empirical part of this paper, and have confined this to presenting a chronology of events from which one can observe the pattern of elite decisions. Furthermore, my main data sources for the analysis were newspaper articles and reports by NGOs who work solely on press freedom. While I believe that the pattern of concessions in the Turkish media and the ebb and flow nature of oppositional journalism in Venezuela do confirm my expectations, further research is needed to more confidently establish the causality argued here. I hope to expand on this research in the future, in particular by tackling and engaging with the motives I ascribe to the business community. I could not collect such data in the form of first-hand accounts by the economic elites because of time and resource

constraints, but further research is needed in this area in order for me to argue for causality more comprehensively. In a similar vein, the analysis can be expanded to assess the “strong state” argument as explained earlier in this paper in different contexts. One possible comparison would be to the Putin regime in Russia, which has also used economic coercion to successfully suppress the oppositional media in the country. On an initial consideration, the Russian case can be raised as an example for the “strong state” argument; however looking at the economic dynamics underlying this media suppression can shed light on the extent to which the argument presented here is limited or generalizable.

On a concluding note, I would like to point out that besides the theoretical implications of this paper that can contribute to academic arguments pertaining to state autonomy and state-capital relations, the significance of this research also lies in its underscoring of the hazards posed by a corporate-dominated media to the freedom of press and maintenance of journalism as a crucial political activity. As the occasional manipulation of media by powerful interests both in Turkey and Venezuela show, for the elites journalistic integrity is to be dispensed with quickly when it serves their best interest. Furthermore, the elites who at times use the media to expose news that can potentially destabilize a government will sacrifice that press freedom when they prefer stability of another government. Another significant implication of this research lies with what should be considered as a valuable press activity. I believe what emerges from the Venezuelan case is that an engaged press, even if it is fervently divided into partisan camps, can be more useful politically to keep regimes in check and the populace informed. While the partisan nature of journalism in Venezuela has undoubtedly harmed the country’s democratic foundations at times, in particular during the coup attempt of 2002, its politically engaged nature ensures that government’s actions cannot be brushed off under the carpet. In Turkey,

unfortunately, the concessions to the government on press freedom have meant an auto-censorship before all else that editors and journalists impose on themselves due to the pressures from the government and their employers.

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