Towards the democratization of the European media system: a comparative analysis of media reform programs in the alternative left

Hacia la democratización del sistema mediático europeo: análisis comparado de proyectos de reforma mediática en los programas de la izquierda alternativa

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This article carries out a comparative review and critical analysis of the media reform proposals of seven European 'alternative' or 'critical' left forces from six countries (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Germany, the UK and France). **Methodology:** The aim is to assess the existence or possibility of common roadmaps and horizons on this issue for the European critical left. To this end, a documentary review and thematic and volumetric analysis (Krippendorff, 1990) of the most recent national electoral programs of each party was undertaken, their specific proposals and styles of formulation were compiled and classified, and a comparative analysis was carried out. **Results:** Up to three different and compatible taxonomies are proposed for the measures recorded. The proposals made by different parties differ markedly in both volume and approach. A categorisation of these proposals by programmatic axes, themes and sub-themes is provided, as well as a summary list of each party's proposals. Incompatibilities, common areas, and programmatic gaps are identified. **Discussion:** the timeliness of some programmatic formulations is discussed, and possible incorporations of interest for the case of political

forces of Spanish origin are identified. **Conclusions:** The first research hypothesis is discarded, but the rest is validated: a certain widely shared programmatic framework already exists *de facto*, although it registers important blind spots. They frequently fall on different areas in each case analysed, thus proving the potential for mutual borrowing and learning between the different parties and the potential progress that this could mean in the articulation of a common programmatic framework that generates synergies towards a democratic media reform in the European sphere.

Keywords: Media reform; Media system; Political Economy of Communication; Alternative left; Political communication; Media policies; Communication policie.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Este artículo realiza una revisión comparativa y análisis crítico sobre las propuestas de reforma mediática de siete fuerzas europeas de la izquierda "alternativa" o "crítica", provenientes de seis países (España, Portugal, Grecia, Alemania, Reino Unido y Francia). **Metodología:** El objetivo es evaluar la existencia o posibilidad de hojas de ruta y horizontes comunes sobre esa cuestión para la izquierda crítica europea y, especialmente, examinar qué aprendizajes pueda hacer la izquierda española del resto de fuerzas europeas. Para ello, se acomete una revisión documental y análisis de contenido comparado (Krippendorff, 1990) temático y cuantitativo de los programas electorales de ámbito nacional más recientes de cada partido. Se han recopilado y clasificado sus propuestas específicas y estilos de formulación, y se ha realizado sobre ello el análisis comparado. **Resultados:** Se proponen hasta tres taxonomías diferentes y compatibles para las medidas registradas. Las propuestas realizadas por diferentes partidos difieren notablemente tanto en volumen como en enfoque. Se ofrece una categorización de estas propuestas por ejes programáticos, temas y subtemas, así como un listado sintético de las de cada partido. Se identifican incompatibilidades, áreas comunes, y vacíos programáticos. **Discusión:** Se discute la oportunidad de algunas formulaciones programáticas y se localizan posibles incorporaciones de interés para el caso de las fuerzas políticas de origen español. **Conclusiones:** Queda descartada la primera hipótesis de investigación, pero se valida el resto: sí existe ya, *de facto*, un cierto marco programático ampliamente compartido, aunque registra importantes puntos ciegos. Estos recaen, frecuentemente, sobre áreas diferentes en cada caso analizado. En tal medida, se comprueba la potencialidad de préstamos y aprendizajes mutuos entre los diferentes partidos y el potencial avance que esto podría suponer en la articulación de un marco programático común que genere sinergias hacia una reforma mediática democrática en el ámbito europeo.

Palabras clave: Reforma mediática; Sistema de medios; Economía Política de la Comunicación; Izquierda alternativa; Comunicación política; Políticas mediáticas; Políticas de comunicación.

1.   Introduction

We are living in an international political-economic context crossed by, at least, three serious global threats dialectically interconnected with each other: the threat of the escalation and cronification of the Ukraine-Russia war into an international conflict between broad blocs, mainly between the USA and China; the threat of the growing socio-economic impact of the climate crisis; and the threat of democratic regression, setbacks in terms of social justice and loss of rights, stemming from the two aforementioned dynamics in parallel with the rise of destructive populisms[1] worldwide. The financial crisis generated by the real estate bubble in 2008 was falsely resolved in most European countries. This resolution was carried out through structural adjustment policies that failed to achieve the recovery of purchasing power for the working classes, to safeguard the achievements of the so-called welfare state built in the second half of the last century, as well as to contain the growth of economic inequality, thus inaugurating a new era of wage poverty.

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[1] Here we understand by the right-wing populisms, such as the cases of Donald Trump in the USA, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marine Le Pen in France, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, or Santiago Abascal in Spain.

"The scientific literature on media reform is not scarce. In fact, there is a long-standing tradition related to the Political Economy of Communication, and it features very specific theorizations, such as those proposed by Des Freedman (2014) or Manuel Puppis (2010)."

In this scenario, the configuration of national, regional, and global mass media systems is a key factor in shaping political arenas, and therefore in the possibility of progress for all types of social movements and citizen demands for democratization and social justice. Media reform is, in fact, a strategic goal for transformative or counter-hegemonic left forces, which aim to reverse any increase in inequalities and any regression in terms of social justice and civil rights. Any achievements in media policy will enable them to engage in other political disputes under less fav conditions, in cultural spaces that are less biased and less imbalanced in favor of economic elites.

Based on these considerations, this article undertakes a comparative review and critical analysis to evaluate and interconnect the political proposals for media reform present in the national electoral programs of European left-wing "alternative" or "critical" forces. The adjectives alternative, critical, counter-hegemonic, or transformative are used to characterize different attempts from various realms (academic, activist, journalistic, etc.) to describe the family of left-wing parties, sometimes referred to in the mass media as "radical" or "extreme" (specifically referring to *Podemos*, *Syriza*, *Bloco de Esquerda*, *La France Insoumise*, *Die Linke*, or Momentum – all of which are influenced by the Marxist paradigm). These parties are socially positioned to the left of classic social-democratic formations, which have evolved into social-liberal ideologies (such as PSOE, PASOK, French Socialist Party, Portuguese Socialist Party, PSD, or the Blairist faction within the British Labour Party, associated with the Third Way paradigm). The former align themselves with the European parliamentary group of The Left- GUE/NGL, while the latter align with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. We are aware of the connotations and undesired biases introduced by each of the suggested terms, but we find journalistic labels in common use even more biased. Therefore, we opt for a variety of descriptors to delineate an ideological area with necessarily imprecise boundaries.

For our analysis, we have selected six countries: Spain, Portugal, Greece, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. Our choice is due to the fact that in these countries, political and social forces represented by media figures such as Pablo Iglesias, Catarina Martins, Alexis Tsipras, Janine Wissler, Jeremy Corbyn, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon (respectively) have experienced significant electoral surges (and declines) in the last decade. They have largely capitalized on the social discontent generated by widespread austerity measures following the financial crash of 2008. This has made them essential partners for the hegemonic social-liberal left to either regain or maintain positions of government, as seen in Spain and Portugal, or even to govern independently, as in the case of Greece. In some countries, their rise led to the displacement and marginalization of the previously hegemonic social-liberal left, as seen in Greece, France, or within the British Labour Party. However, these parties, currents, and the social movements they were built upon are currently experiencing moments of reflux and setback.

Their media reform programs generally incorporate proposals that have emerged from civil society linked to the media sector (unions, professional organizations, associations, social movements, academia, etc.). Mapping and comparing these proposals will allow us to assess the possibilities of articulating a shared programmatic framework for media reform at supranational levels, a crucial element in a world of communications that is irreversibly globalized, particularly in the realm of the digital public sphere. It aims to contribute to advancing and enriching ongoing debates and academic reflections in this field, both in terms of communication public policies and in political communication and discourse construction for political and cultural disputes. Such debates can help advance the democratization of media systems, improve their levels of representativeness, participation, and pluralism, in order to ensure that these systems support rather than hinder the growing realization of Human Rights, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other democratic challenges facing our societies in the current historical juncture.

Since we are conducting our study in Spain and have the interest, among others, of being useful for program development related to media reform by critical left-wing forces in Spain, we will pay special attention to the Spanish case, focusing not only on one but on two political forces within this spectrum in our country.

1.1. State of the issue

The scientific literature on media reform is not scarce. In fact, there is a long-standing tradition related to the Political Economy of Communication, and it features very specific theorizations, such as those proposed by Des Freedman (2014) or Manuel Puppis (2010). The former provides a description of the role of political and economic power in shaping media regulations and explores "the means by which alternative options are marginalized, conflicting values are delegitimized, and rival interests are disregarded" (Freedman, 2014, p.64). Drawing on Deepa Kumar's dialectical theory (2007) about the relationship between commercial media and social movements, Freedman also explains how systemic contradictions allow social movements to exert effective pressure to gain positions and advance the media reform agenda in contrast to elite-sponsored perspectives (Freedman, 2014, pp.118-119). The latter, on the other hand, develops a definition of media governance based on new sociological institutionalism (Puppis, 2010, pp. 143), aiming to capture the entirety of regulations designed to organize the media system. This simultaneously allows us to expand and refine the criteria for significant measures under this framework. These theoretical approaches have been carried out from both global perspectives (Raboy and Padovani, 2010; Siochrú et al., 2002) and regional/local perspectives, with notable contributions, for example, in cases such as Latin America (Mestman and Mastrini, 1996) or Canada (Gasher et al., 2016).

Theorizations addressing the concept of media reform with the aim of achieving greater political health in contemporary democracies are quite common. They highlight how the current structure of media paradoxically hampers democratic functioning, considering that the theoretical role of the fourth estate should involve scrutinizing other branches of power, rather than aligning with them for mutual reinforcement of particular interests (Feintuck and Varney, 2006; Hackett, 2000; Lunt and Livingstone, 2011; McChesney, 2000; Trappel, 2011; Trappel and Meier, 2011). Particularly notable here is R. McChesney's award-winning book "Rich Media, Poor Democracy" (2000). L. Stein, D. Kidd, and C. Rodríguez edited an extensive volume on the transformative social role of alternative media in building a more democratic, inclusive, and participatory society (2009a). With a more specific focus, in our country, A. Barranquero-Carretero's contribution (20119a) stands out, emphasizing the need for media regulation to enhance civic life and human rights, and highlighting how social journalism can act as a catalyst to achieve such goals. Innovative approaches have recently emerged, framing this reform from the perspective of the climate emergency, closely related to the need to construct more sustainable models of production and consumption (Park, 2021).

There are also reviews of the history of legislation to regulate media, with broad perspectives addressing the US and Western Europe (van Cuilenburg and McQuail, 2003), or specific countries like Argentina (Segura, 2011) or Mexico (Esteinou, 2002). Portugal is the focus of the work by Lameiras and Sousa (2017), where they account for the resolutions and positions of the Council of Europe and the European Union regarding regulation of the audiovisual sector, analyzing how Portugal followed these recommendations for media reform in the context of the crisis between 2008 and 2015. In the case of Spain, we have works like that of Sarikakis and Rodríguez-Amat (2014) discussing the legislative change of the Sinde Law on intellectual property in Spain.

However, the most common perspective is likely that of activism and citizen movements, especially when we move beyond the theoretical realm and focus on contributions centered on practical experiences. We find works with an international perspective that gather experiences of activist groups and civil society from numerous countries (Freedman et al., 2016; Padovani and Calabrese, 2014; Stein et al., 2009b). Some of these analyze specific international campaigns, such as the CRIS campaign: Communication Rights in the Information Society (Thomas, 2006). Others focus on the most innovative forms of media activism (Pickard and Yang, 2017). Some provide literature reviews about the media reform movement (Napoli, 2007) or reflect on what citizens can do to transform media structures and democratize the media system (Hackett and Carroll, 2006). Among

the latter, Barranquero-Carretero's work (2019b) offers a historical overview of milestones in media reform worldwide. We also have contributions focused on activism and movements for media reform from a regional perspective. Many of these are centered on the US, like Fones-Wolf's (2006), which focuses on the struggle for radio democratization, Miguel's (2007) work on the Telecommunications Act, or the works of Tucho (2006) and McChesney (2009), valuable for understanding the media reform movement in that country. In our country, we find contributions on the effectiveness of activism in influencing parliamentary political agendas to promote media democratization (Álvarez-Peralta, 2017), on the role of the 15-M and #yosoy132 social movements in Spain and Mexico respectively, in democratizing the media system as a necessary step within the broader process of societal democratization (Candón-Mena, 2013), on how media observatories can serve citizens to drive media system reforms (Rosique and Barranquero, 2016), and on initiatives for citizens to control and oversee media's work (Barranquero-Carretero et al., 2014).

However, this diverse bibliographic landscape points to a blind spot that has hardly been covered: the study of programmatic proposals for media reform by political parties. Given that most works focus on citizen initiatives or analyze public policies, only a few adopt the programmatic framework as a specific object of study. Álvarez-Peralta has given it some attention. In one of his earlier works, he analyzes the programmatic proposals for media reform from the main parties that participated in the Spanish general elections of 2011 and 2016 (Álvarez-Peralta, 2017). In a subsequent study, he examines the media coverage received by the media reform proposals formulated by *Unidos Podemos* during its first term in office (Álvarez-Peralta and Carañana, 2018). In a third work, he analyzes, from a participatory perspective, the challenges faced by party leaders in shaping potential media reform programs in dialogue with civil society directly involved (Álvarez-Peralta, 2020). However, the specific focus on media reform programs used as an electoral tool remains largely overlooked within the realm of media studies.

This article aims to address this bibliographic gap from a specific perspective: to understand the programmatic proposals for media reform put forth by certain parties of the counter-hegemonic left that serve as references in the European context. These parties operate in the following countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. The goal is to analyze whether, in light of these proposals, we can identify the options that the European left has for crafting a common roadmap in this regard.

It's worth noting that analyzing the programmatic constructions of the radical left is of particular interest since, except for exceptional and fleeting periods, these critical left parties are not in positions of government and, therefore, do not enact public policies that we can analyze. Their proposals are thus largely programmatic, and these programs are a primary tool of their intervention. Analyzing the public policies of the critical left falls outside the scope of our methodological framework. Additionally, the parties that have often held government positions in Europe over the last sixty years are social-liberals and liberal-conservatives (or Christian Democrats). Such parties tend to manage the existing media system, built upon the economic premises of the liberal paradigm, rather than advocating for its reform. Consequently, proposals for reform are largely found in the programs of the left parties analyzed here. On the other hand, the far-right, as the fourth political paradigm to consider in this distribution of positions, adopts a program generally identified with the more neoliberal paradigm (cutbacks in the public and community sectors and deregulation for the private sector) in the case of neoliberal far-right groups (such as VOX in Spain or Giorgia Meloni's government in Italy). For the more illiberal or hybrid far-right groups (like FN in France, UKIP in the United Kingdom, Chega in Portugal, or Golden Dawn in Greece), their program is centered on content control with conservative leanings. Thus, discussing media reform programs in Europe is, in general, synonymous with discussing alternative left-wing programs.

2. Objectives

2.1. Hypotheses

The objectives of this work are defined in the form of starting questions or research questions to be answered, as well as through the three research hypotheses listed below:

- H1: There is no widely shared programmatic framework among the main reference forces of critical or alternative left in Europe.

- H2: There are programmatic gaps related to this topic in their political programs, despite its transcendental importance both in terms of public policies and potential cultural and ideological impact.

- H3: The programmatic differences are related to these gaps (with different prioritizations and styles of formulation and with distinct areas of interest), rather than with alleged incompatibilities betweentheir demands or analyses, suggesting the existence of potential mutual learning.

This kind of programmatic synchronization has enabled European left-wing parties, as a political sector more connected with radical and transformative social movements, to generate very fertile synergies in areas such as the feminist movement or economic and labour demands for social justice. In this way, efforts have been coordinated to conduct studies, make public grievances, develop pilot projects, or create arguments. It has also allowed for collective voices to gain greater visibility and resonance for these proposals, as seen in the case of initiatives to balance women's representation in leadership positions, promote work-life balance, or recognize care work. Similarly, for proposals like Universal Basic Income, reducing the workweek, strengthening pension systems, or narrowing the fiscal gap between capital and labour incomes. However, this potentially fruitful synchronization is yet to be realized for media reform demands, largely due to the taboo it represents for the neoliberal economic paradigm dominant during the last two decades of the previous century and the first of this one.

2.2. Research questions

The guiding questions that serve as a starting point and orientation for this study include the following 22 questions:

1. Are the issues of media reform present in the parties' programs?

2. In which sections are the demands for media reform included? Do they have their own section or subsection, or are these proposals usually incorporated within other sections (such as Economy, Industry, Equality, Social Justice, or Culture)?

3. What differences, similarities, consistencies, or inconsistencies exist among the media reform programs of left-wing parties in Europe, both in terms of focus and specific proposals? Is there a common framework or an implicit possibility of it? What lessons can the Spanish left draw from this?

4. What specific proposals are made for each of the three communication sectors (private, public, and third sector), or for each of the major communication technologies, channels, and platforms (such as DTT, terrestrial and digital radio, radio spectrum, Internet, digital OTT or IPTV platforms, ISPs, digital social networks, etc.)?

5. What specific proposals are put forth regarding the press systems and the practice of journalism, as well as access to cultural production in the media?

3. Methodology

Our methodological approach is comparative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1990; Piñuel, 2002), specifically focusing on document content analysis (Moreiro and Marzal, 2001). We have analyzed the most recent national-level programs of the main counter-hegemonic, alternative, or 'critical' left-wing party in each of the mentioned countries, namely: *Die Linke in Germany*, *La France Insoumise* in France, The Labour Party in the United Kingdom, *Syriza* in Greece, *Bloco de Esquerda* in Portugal, and the electoral coalition *Unidas Podemos* in Spain. As we have already pointed out, since our study is conducted in Spain and with the intention of providing insight for the programmatic development of Spanish critical left-wing forces in terms of media reform, we have also analyzed *Más País*. The resulting corpus is as follows:

Table 1. *Election programs analyzed in the comparative study.*

Party	Program
Die Linke	Election program for the 2021 Bundestag elections.
La France Insoumise	Thematic notebook on media communication 2022 "L'information est un bien commun" from the program "L'Avenir en commun."
The Labour Party	"Party manifesto" program 2019.
Syriza	Program for the parliamentary elections 2019.
Bloco de Esquerda	Program for the legislative elections 2022.
Unidas Podemos	Program for the general elections 2019.
Más País	Program for the general elections 2019 (both the summarized general program and the four specific thematic ones).

Sources: Official websites of the respective political parties. Contact with their press or International Relations offices. Author´s own work.

Regarding this corpus, we have applied two search methods to locate proposals related to media communication systems, in a broad sense:

1. Specific sections related to media communication in the indices of each program.

2. Search throughout each program using a list of 26 terms or keywords (and their derivations sharing the same root or synonyms). The search was conducted in Spanish for *Unidas Podemos* and *Más País*, in English for The Labour Party, in German for *Die Linke*, and in Portuguese for *Bloco de Esquerda*. As for Syriza, their program was translated into Spanish, and the search was subsequently carried out in that language. In the case of *La France Insoumise*, the task was simpler as they have an independent and specific 20-page program for media reform. Each search term revealed not only the measures containing that term but often adjacent ones as they are usually thematically grouped.

Table 2. *Search terms used for tracking measures.*

Spanish	English	German	Portuguese
Radio	Radio	Radio	Rádio
TV	TV	TV	Tv
Televisión	Television	Fernsehen	Televisão
Medios	Media	Medien	Meios
Comunicación	Mass media	Kommunikation	Comunicação
Información	Information media	Informationen	Informação
Radioespectro	radio spectrum	Radiospektrum	espectro de rádio
Cine	Cinema / cine / movie	Kino	Cinema

Radiodifusión	Broadcast-	Rundfunk	Transmissão
Prensa	Press	Presse	Imprensa
Periodismo	Journalism	Journalismus	Jornalismo
Periodista	Journalist	Journalist	Jornalista
Periódico	Newspaper	Zeitung	Jornal
Secreto profesional	Professional secret	Berufsgeheimnis	Sigilo profissional
Denunciantes	Whistleblowers	Whistleblowers	Delatores
Medios públicos	Public media	Öffentliche Medien	mídia pública
Medios comunitarios	Community Media	Gemeinschaftsmedium Freie Medien	mídia comunitária
RTVE	BBC	ZDF	RTP
Internet	Internet	Internet /WLAN	Internet
Redes sociales	Social networks	Soziale Medien	Redes sociais
Digitalización	Digitization	Digitalisierung	Digitalização
Digital	Digital	Digital	Digital
TDT	DTT DTTV Digital terrestrial television	DTF Digitales terrestrisches Fernsehen	TDT Televisão digital terrestre
DAB	DAB	DAB	DAB
DVB DVB-T	DVB DVB-T	DVB DVB-T	DVB DVB-T

Source: Author's own work.

This search yielded multiple measures related to our research subject, as well as others that were not as relevant. As a result, a decision was made to exclude measures containing keywords related to issues unrelated to media reform, such as measures concerning the digitization of public administration or laws on transparent consumer information.

The remaining measures were translated, classified, and summarized synthetically. Themes and subthemes developed by each measure were identified.

This selection of 7 electoral programs from 6 European countries, representing as many parties, constitutes a total corpus of 907 pages, from which 105 electoral measures directly related to media reform proposals have been collected. These measures either directly propose media reform or imply necessary interventions that specifically affect their respective media systems.

3.1. Taxonomy of programmatic measures

Based on the themes identified during the study of the programs (i.e., not starting from a pre-formulated theoretical categorization, but generated in the course of the analysis inductively), we have constructed a classification of the programmatic proposals analyzed into 12 distinct thematic areas.

Some measures were presented in their respective programs under a specific heading, but we have identified them as belonging to another area based on their content. For example, the program of *La France Insoumise* contains measures explicitly presented under the heading "Right to Information," which involve various public powers being part of a National Communication Council to establish citizen counterpower that prevents media concentration, guarantees pluralism, and enforces the law. Therefore, we have considered them under the heading "Media Democratization."

The programmatic measures are also organized into four major axes according to their orientation. These axes are cross-cutting across the taxonomy of the 12 categories mentioned earlier. They are not overarching macro-categories containing those categories (although in some cases there is a strong non-biunivocal correspondence), but they are more related to the orientation of the measure rather than the specific theme. The axes follow a more goal-oriented than thematic criterion, while the thematic taxonomy proceeds in the opposite direction.

4. Results

4.1. Thematic areas

Below are the twelve thematic areas identified through the inductive method described in the previous section. We have included sub-areas where certain sub themes are repeated more than twice.

1. Free access or exchange of culture or information
    1. Subtheme: open-source software
2. Strengthening public communication services
    1. Subtheme: labor rights
    2. Subtheme: funding public services
3. Digitalization
    1. Subtheme: digital divide
4. Privacy
5. Preventing media concentration and promoting pluralism
6. Media literacy
7. Universal accessibility (for diverse functional groups and to make digital information more transparent and accessible)
8. Gender equality
9. Autonomy and independence in reporting[2]
10. Fiscal reform for the private media system
11. Labor and union rights (in private and/or community media)
12. Citizen participation in the media system

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[2] This category includes measures aimed at promoting editorial independence as well as strengthening informational sovereignty, which are closely related.

Likewise, and based on the compiled measures, four main axes of programmatic development were established:

- *Democratization of the media:* measures aimed at promoting transparency in the functioning of the media, preventing media concentration, increasing pluralism, avoiding media operation being subordinate to political or financial interests, and instead fostering an information market aligned with public, civic, and democratic interests, etc.

- *Right to culture and information:* initiatives seeking to enhance users' rights to access information, such as decriminalizing content sharing on the internet or eliminating the digital divide experienced by rural, elderly, or impoverished communities.

- *Digital rights:* proposals to ensure that, in the new digital landscape, users are not subject to abuses by different sources of power, whether corporations, governments, or criminals, who might exploit their private data or surveil their communications.

- *Others:* measures often, but not always, related to content control (gender violence, LGBTQ+ rights, health, ecology, or animal rights).
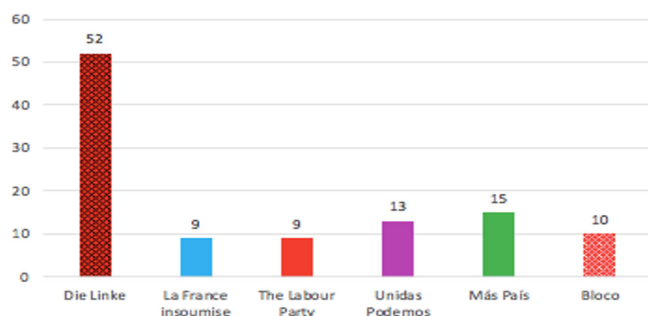
4.2. Programmatic Volume

Firstly, we find a significant disparity in terms of the volume of measures presented (Figure 1). *Die Linke* stands out with a considerable lead, presenting 52 measures. Next is *Más País* with 15, followed by *Unidas Podemos* with 13. *Bloco de Esquerda* presents 10 measures. *La France Insoumise* and The Labour Party both present 9. Lastly, *Syriza* does not present any media reform measures within its program contents, although they have obviously made decisions in this regard as a government. For this reason, this party will not be included in the graphs.

However, these data are misleading. They should be read in relation to a second variable: the degree of detail and definition of those measures. All parties tend to present

Figure 1: *Number of programmatic media reform measures for each party*

Source: Author's own work based on their respective official electoral programs.

a similar level of elaboration, offering lines of action whose implementation is often explained with concrete measures, but in some cases, they remain somewhat general statements of intent.

However, *La France Insoumise* elaborates on each measure in a very detailed, attentive, and exhaustive manner, to the extent that it almost resembles a sort of draft law outlining figures, timelines, or percentages in the formation of bodies. So much so that the French party is the only one to present a specific program on media, with a length of 20 pages. In this regard, we can conclude that the parties that dedicate the most attention to this issue are *Die Linke* and *La France Insoumise*.
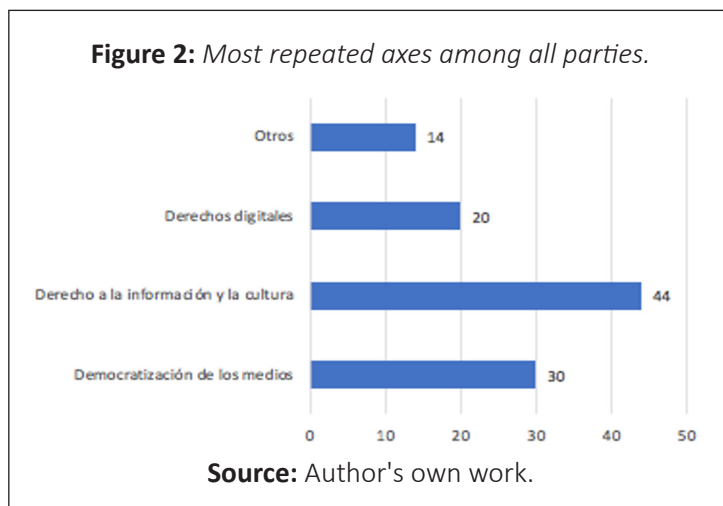
4.3. Programmatic Axes

At first glance, the axis prioritized by the different parties is the "Right to Culture and Information" (44 measures), followed by "Media Democratization" (30), "Digital Rights" (20), and "Content Control" (14), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Most repeated axes among all parties.*

Source: Author's own work.

Figure 3: *Most repeated axes disaggregated by party.*

	Democratización de los medios	Derecho a la información y la cultura	Derechos digitales	Otros
Die Linke	12	20	17	3
La France insoumise	7	2	0	0
The Labour Party	3	3	2	1
Unidas Podemos	2	7	1	3
Más País	2	6	0	7
Bloco	4	6	0	0

Source: Author's own work.

However, once again these figures can be misleading. A larger volume of an axis does not necessarily mean that it is important for all the studied parties, due to a great disparity of criteria among the formations. For example, as shown in Figure 3, *Die Linke* gives great importance to digital rights, which the other parties do not prioritize to the same extent. On the contrary, *Die Linke* does not emphasize media democratization as much, whereas the program of *La France Insoumise* is primarily focused on it.

The previous graph allows us to observe that *Die Linke* offers the most balanced program, with a good number of measures from each axis. The same could be said for The Labour Party, although with a small number of measures. While *La France Insoumise* offers a powerful program, it focuses almost exclusively on a single theme: media democratization. Similarly, *Unidas Podemos* focuses on the right to information, while also including measures from the other axes. *Bloco de Esquerda* has a considerable number of proposals, all aimed at media democratization and the right to culture and information, without addressing digital rights or including measures for content control. *Mas País* does the opposite of *Bloco de Esquerda*: the majority of its measures are about content control, covering issues such as LGBTI rights, feminism, ecology, or animal rights, while also paying attention to the right to culture and information. It's noteworthy that digital rights are an axis that *Die Linke* dedicates a lot of attention to, with numerous proposals aimed at protecting privacy, while it's a minor or non-existent axis for the rest of the parties.
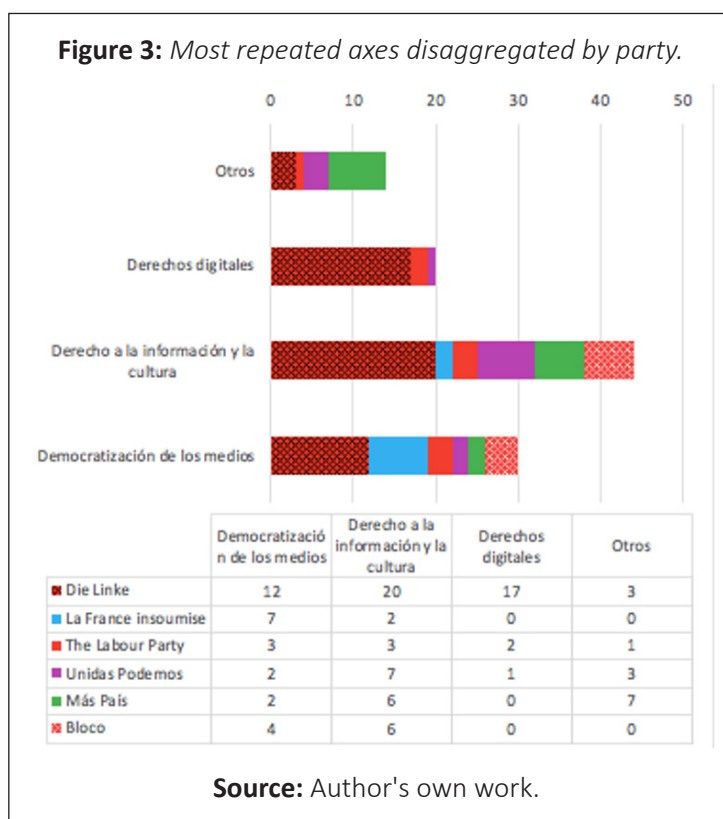
4.4. Themes and Subthemes

Among the identified themes and subthemes (see section 3, Methodology), some stand out clearly as more common (figure 4). Free access or exchange of culture or information is the most repeated, with 28 measures, including the subtheme of open-source software, with five measures. Strengthening public communication

services is the subject of 18 measures, of which five are specifically aimed at enhancing labor rights and four at increasing the funding for these public services. Digitalization proposals amount to 17 measures, with 13 of them targeting the reduction and elimination of digital divides, especially in rural areas, by providing affordable internet access or ensuring broadband coverage throughout the territory. Privacy and media pluralism themes follow with 16 and 15 measures respectively. The remaining themes have between 7 and 4 proposals.
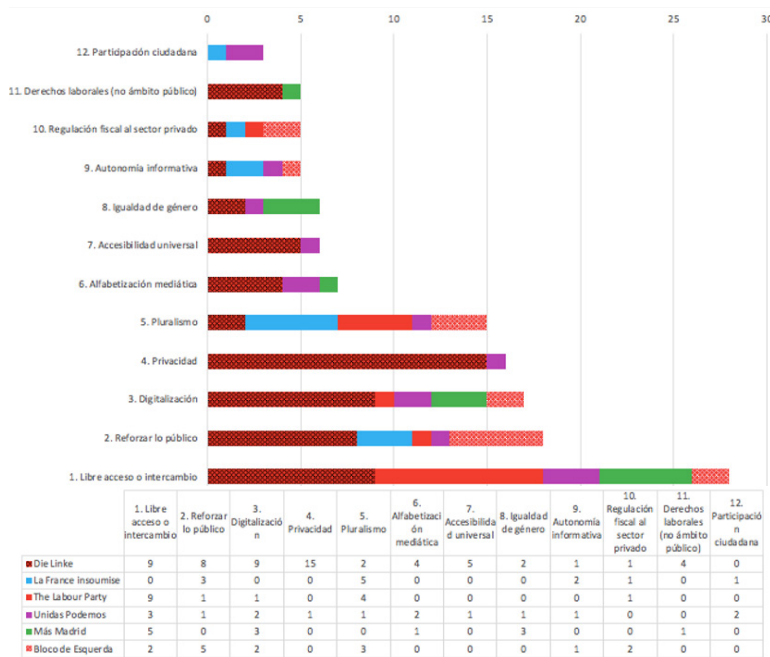

Figure 4: *Frequency of the most common themes among all the analyzed parties, ordered from least to most frequent.*
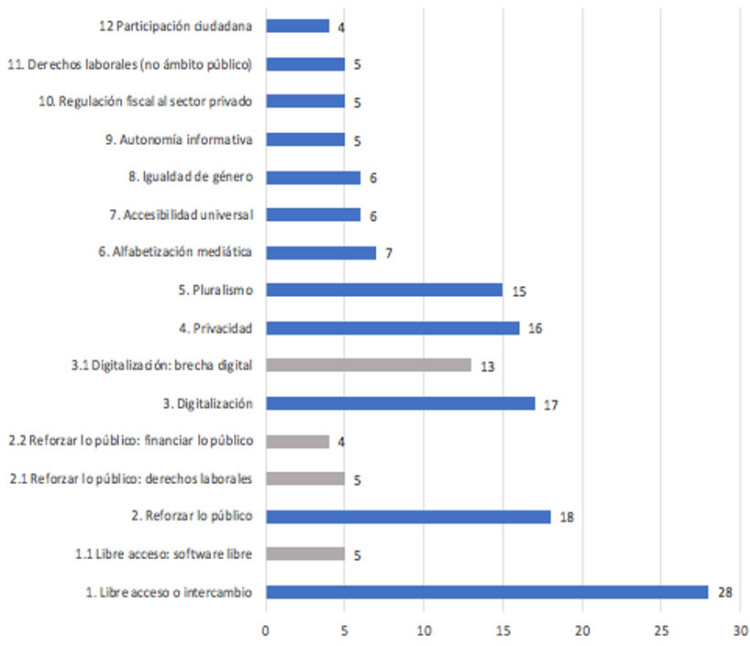
Source: Author's own work.

If we disaggregate these data by party, we find once again that there is a disparity of criteria that distorts the importance of each theme. The theme "privacy," which ranks third in terms of volume, is almost exclusively present in *Die Linke 's* program. It is absent from the rest of the programs, except for *Unidas Podemos*, where we find one measure related to it. The same applies to universal accessibility and labor rights outside the public sector.

Figure 5: *Frequency of the most common themes disaggregated by party.*

	1. Libre acceso o intercambio	2. Reforzar lo público	3. Digitalización	4. Privacidad	5. Pluralismo	6. Alfabetización mediática	7. Accesibilidad universal	8. Igualdad de género	9. Autonomía informativa	10. Regulación fiscal al sector privado	11. Derechos laborales (no ámbito público)	12. Participación ciudadana
Die Linke	9	8	9	15	2	4	5	2	1	1	4	0
La France insoumise	0	3	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	1
The Labour Party	9	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Unidas Podemos	3	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	2
Más Madrid	5	0	3	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	0
Bloco de Esquerda	2	5	2	0	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0

Source: Author's own work.

If we look for the opposite, that is, certain programmatic agreement among parties, we see that the themes that generate the most consensus are:

1. Free access or exchange of culture and information.

2. Reinforcement of public communication services.

3. Prevention of media concentration and promotion of pluralism.

4. Autonomy and informational independence.

5. Fiscal regulation of the private media system.

4.5. Location of Measures within the Program

Beyond the proposed measures, the mere fact of dedicating a specific section of the program to the issue of media communication already signifies a higher degree of commitment to visibility and importance of this matter. If in the previous section we addressed the first research question, this section directly connects with the second research question.

Among the six programs analyzed (excluding *Syriza 's* which, as we recall, did not include proposals), only one does so exclusively: this is the case of *La France Insoumise*, which actually offers a separate program titled "L'information est un bien en commun" ("Information is a common good"), although it's true that they also do the same with a total of 42 topics in what constitutes their "livrets thématiques" ("thematic booklets"). The Labour Party also presents a specific section, though shared with other matters, under the title "Digital, culture, media, and sports".

The rest of the parties do not present the measures in a dedicated section, but rather distribute them throughout the rest of the program. *Die Linke* includes them primarily within the sections "digitalization" and "culture". *Unidas Podemos* places them in "Digital Horizon and New Economy" and "Democratic and Citizenship Guarantees," mainly. In the case of *Bloco de Esquerda*, they are spread across sections such as "Culture," "Democracy," "Education," "Territorial Cohesion," and "Fiscal Measures against Inequality." More specifically, *Más País* presents them in an even more distributed manner across various sections, though they have a stronger presence in the section titled "Spain, a Country of Care" (which also has a separate specific program).

4.6. Formulation style

All the programs, except for that of *La France Insoumise*, present a similar formulation style, offering measures that state an objective to achieve, their benefits, and their main means of implementation. However, Jean-Luc Melenchon's program presents a very high level of specificity and development. Each proposal is expanded into a large number of subheadings that specify numerous aspects of the measure and provide detailed means of implementation, even resembling draft laws. Concrete figures for the establishment of governing bodies or their specific functions can be found, for example.

4.7. Synthetic Summary and Analysis of Analyzed Measures

Below, we provide a summary of the programmatic measures proposed by the studied parties in each of these categories, along with the themes and subthemes we have identified in each measure. The order in which we present the parties corresponds to the population size of their respective countries.

In the following Table 3, you can find the measures that each party has presented, which, under our analysis, have been identified as aimed at democratizing the media. These measures are summarized by us; their complete wording can be found in the respective programs.

"However, this potentially fruitful synchronization is yet to be realized for media reform demands"

Table 3: *Summary of measures in the "Media Democratization" block by parties.*

Programmatic measure	Topics and subtopics
Die Linke	
Preserving public communication institutions to have autonomy in scheduling their broadcasts, safeguarding their freedom of broadcasting.	Informational autonomy
Adequately remunerate productions commissioned to third parties by public institutions. Link the awarding of contracts to external production companies with compliance with social norms such as collective wages, minimum salaries, and sector-specific minimum rates.	Labor rights
Protection for media workers against attacks, persecution, and violence.	Strengthening the public sphere: Subtopics: - Labor rights - Protecting the journalist
Protection of journalists as holders of professional secrets, as well as protection of their sources.	Whistleblowers Strengthening the public sphere: Subtopics: - Labor rights - Protecting the journalist
Collective negotiations and fee agreements for freelance workers must be anchored in the law.	Labor Rights
Strengthen the rights of freelancers and quasi-employees and provide them with secure income and employment prospects.	Labor Rights
Rolling back the market and monopolistic power of large companies and digital platforms, and democratically controlling them.	Anti-concentration
Digital companies must pay taxes in the countries where they conduct their economic activity.	Fiscal regulation of the private sector
Promote platform cooperatives and publicly operated platforms as alternatives.	Anti-concentration
Constitutional right to guarantee net neutrality.	Neutrality
Promote the development and use of open-source operating systems and applications by the State.	Free access or exchange: Subtopic: Open-source software
The software used in educational institutions should be open-source software.	Free access or exchange: Subtopic: Open-source software
La France Insoumise	
Enshrine freedom and independence of the press through constitutional reform	Informational autonomy
Creation of a National Council of Media, with a diverse composition, aimed at being a citizen counterpower with intervention authority.	Citizen participation Anti-concentration
Parliamentary election of the presidency of the public broadcasting corporation after a public campaign presenting candidates and competing projects.	Political control
Increased participation of staff representatives in the boards of administration.	Professional participation
Pass a framework law on media ownership to combat concentration.	Anti-concentration Pluralism Radio spectrum
Promote alternative financing and organizational models to the current shareholder and advertising-based model.	Fiscal regulation of the private sector Informational autonomy: Subtopic: Financial autonomy
Reforming the management and granting of public aid to print and online press.	Pluralism

Strengthen public information, ensuring funding for public broadcasting.	Pluralism
	
	Strengthening the public sphere:
	Subtopics:
	    - Financing the public
	    - Greater competencies for the public
	    - Labor rights

The Labour Party	
Ensure that the public media regulation agency Ofcom safeguards media ownership plurality.	Pluralis Anti-concentration
Address the monopoly of tech giants over advertising revenues.	Anti-concentration
Support local media.	Pluralism
Unidas Podemos	
Reform of RTVE to make it independent from governments.	Informational autonomy: Subtopics: - Political autonomy - Financial autonomy - Citizen participation Transparency
Prohibit banks and funds from owning media outlets.	Anti-concentration
Más País	
Independence of public media, enhancing their internal democracy, funding, transparency, and citizen participation.	Transparency Citizen participation Informational autonomy: Subtopic: Financial autonomy
Promotion of community media.	Anti-concentration.
Bloco de Esquerda	
Increase the autonomy of media from advertisers by means of...	Informational autonomy: Subtopic: Financial autonomy
Fight against media concentration	Anti-concentration Pluralism
Fight against monopoly in film and audiovisual distribution: creation of a public distribution entity.	Anti-concentration Strengthening the public sector
Creation of a tax on the provision of digital services where user participation creates value for the company.	Fiscal regulation of the private sector.
SYRIZA	
No proposals	

Source: Author's own work.

The following Table 4 presents the measures that each party has offered aimed at facilitating or strengthening the right to culture and information, showing a remarkable diversity of compatible and complementary proposals among them, which articulate a sort of implicit common program, a programmatic foundation upon which it is possible to work to establish a common framework.

Table 4: *Summary of measures from the "Right to Culture and Information" block by parties.*

Programmatic measure	Topics and subtopics
Die Linke	
All existing broadcasters must permanently ensure strong regional and local news coverage.	Strengthening the public sector
The public service offering must be expanded. Fully funded productions should remain indefinitely in media libraries.	Strengthening the public sector. Free access or exchange.
Strengthen the public's right to information.	Strengthening the public sector
Commercial software producers must be obliged to provide support for all common operating systems and platforms, especially open-source ones. Commercial software must also include its source code.	*Free access or exchange. Subtopic: Open-source software*
Rejection of censorship, the use of upload filters, and network blocking.	Free access or exchange Subtopic: Against censorship
Guarantee of universal fiber-optic connection provided by a public company.	Strengthening the Public Sector. Digital Divide: Subtopics - Comprehensive Coverage throughout the Territory - Affordable Internet Connection
Social Centers in Rural Areas with Public Internet Access.	Digital divide: Subtopics: - Comprehensive coverage across the entire territory - Affordable internet connection
Increasing digital participation opportunities for all individuals to counteract the growing exclusion of people with disabilities, the elderly, and individuals from poor environments.	Digital Divide. Universal Accessibility
Digitally safeguarding cultural assets and making them accessible to everyone.	Free access or exchange. Universal accessibility
Strengthening media literacy at all levels of education, the labor market, civil society projects, and in old age.	Media literacy
Promoting children and youth's skills in media literacy and data protection.	Media literacy Privacy
New copyright law that balances the rights of creators with those of users. Repeal the copyright and database protection law for press publishers.	Intellectual property Subtopic: updating to the new context
Decriminalize the non-commercial reproduction and use of copyrighted material.	Open access or sharing Intellectual property
Greater freedom of expression, press freedom, and against state surveillance.	Press freedom Privacy
Mandatory use of open-source software in public administration and the requirement for software funded by public funds to be published as open-source.	Open access or sharing: Subtheme: Free software
Independent wireless public internet network separate from commercial providers.	Reinforcing the public sector. Digital divide: Subtopics*:* - Coverage throughout the entire territory - Affordable internet connection
Information created with public funds should be accessible for free. In particular, data enabling democratic oversight must be made accessible (e.g., machine-readable).	Free access or exchange. Universal accessibility

Fast internet coverage throughout the entire territory.	Digital divide: *Subtopics:* - *Coverage throughout the territory* - *Affordable internet connection*
Free computer, printer, and internet access for all children to ensure proper technological education.	Media literacy Digital divide: Subtopic: Affordable internet access
Internet access for refugees.	Digital divide
La France Insoumise	
Establish the right to information, culture, and a public broadcasting system through Constitutional reform.	Strengthening the public sector.
Protecting journalists, penalizing violence and intimidation against them, reinforcing source confidentiality protection, safeguarding them from abusive lawsuits, among other measures.	*Strengthening the public sector:* *Subtopics:* - *Labor rights* - *Protecting the journalist*
The Labour Party	
Protecting free TV licenses for individuals over 75 years old.	Free TV
Combating fake news. Establishing an investigation into fake news and the legal right of journalists to defend the public interest.	*Fake news*
Free fiber optic broadband by 2030, through a publicly funded network financed by taxation on multinational corporations and tech giants.	Affordable internet connection. Tax regulation on the private sector. Strengthening the public sector: Subtopic: Financing the public sector.
Unidas Podemos	
Freedom of creation on the internet.	*Intellectual property:* *Subtopic:* Greater freedom of creation
Updating intellectual property and copyright to the new landscape, ensuring that more open access to culture is compatible with copyright, which must be strengthened against intermediary benefits.	Free access or exchange. Intellectual property Subtopics*:* - Updating to the new context - More rights for the creator, fewer for the industry
Universal accessibility fund for various services, including information and communication, to not exclude individuals with disabilities.	Universal accessibility.
Moving towards digital connectivity as a basic and free right, guaranteeing coverage and affordable access through a public enterprise and effective competition.	Digital divide: *Subtopics:* - Coverage across all territories - Affordable internet connection
Promoting informational responsibility and critical citizenship in the face of fake news, enhancing media literacy and transparency in public communication spending.	Media literacy Fake news Transparency
Combatting digital exclusion.	Digital divide Media literacy
Empowering Agencia EFE as a public information service, strengthening its structure, increasing funding, transparency, and citizen and political oversight.	Transparency Strengthening the public sector: *Subtopics:* - *Financing the public sector* - *More responsibilities for the public sector* - *Citizen participation/control* - *Political oversight*

Más País	
Opening a permanent debate in defense of a free and open internet.	Free access or exchange Subtopic: Free internet Digitalization
Digitalization, transparency, and free access to politically relevant information for researchers within the Spanish archival system.	Digitalization Free access or exchange
Elimination of the digital divide in rural areas, expanding broadband coverage.	Digital divide *Subtopic: Coverage across all territories*
New intellectual property law that extends protection to new forms of authorship inherent to the digital environment and promotes the use of open-source software.	Intellectual property: Subtopic: Updating to the new context Free access or exchange: Subtopics: Open-source software
Culture and cultural rights law to promote creation, expression, and cultural participation that can ensure the sustainability of cultural industries such as performing arts, music, film, and literature, the enjoyment of citizens' cultural rights, and labor rights.	Free access or exchange Labor rights
Open Wi-Fi linked to public spaces in municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants to guarantee universal internet access.	Digital divide: *Subtopic: Affordable internet connection*
Bloco de Esquerda	
Strengthening public information services, increasing their transparency and funding (through a Google tax).	Tax regulation on the private sector Strengthening the public sector: Subtopic: *Financing the public sector*
Enhancing the capacities and responsibilities of the Portuguese public broadcasting corporation (RTP) in cultural production and dissemination.	Strengthening the public sector: *Subtopic: More responsibilities for the public sector*
Reinforcing RTP's presence in regions, with special attention to the archipelagos, by increasing its financial autonomy, equipment renewal, and improving working conditions.	Strengthening the public sector: *Subtopics:* *Financing the public sector* *Labor rights*
Strengthening RTP's international presence to ensure information for Portuguese emigrants.	Strengthening the public sector
Digitalization and free internet access to national cultural production.	Digitalization Free access or exchange: *Subtopic: Free internet*
Democratizing access to communication by ensuring affordable coverage, removing censorship filters, decriminalizing content sharing, making publicly funded content accessible, and promoting open-source code.	Digital divide: *Subtopics*: - *Coverage across all territories* - *Affordable internet connection* Free access or exchange: *Subtopics*: - *Open-source software* - *Against censorship*
SYRIZA	
Without proposals	

Source: Author's own work.

The proposals focused on regulating the digital rights of users can be found in the following Table 5. As you can see, this is an axis especially developed in Germany by *Die Linke*, which contrasts with the programmatic silence in the rest of the parties, for whom it constitutes a minor issue or even a blind spot.

Table 5: *Summary of measures from the "digital rights" block by parties.*

Programmatic Measure	Topics and Sub Topics
Die Linke	
Transparent and non-discriminatory algorithms.	Universal accessibility
Enhance the protection of young people on the Internet: comprehensive media education for parents, teachers, children, and youth.	Protection of children Media literacy
Ensure data protection and guarantee interoperability and portability of user data with sanctions.	Privacy
The public sector must provide end-to-end encrypted communication channels for email and chat.	Privacy
Prohibit and put an end to the purchase of information about security vulnerabilities in computer systems by intelligence services.	Privacy
Oppose the efforts of the European Commission to criminalize end-to-end encryption.	Privacy
Enable the use of publicly accessible services without the resulting data being commercially exploited. Terms and conditions must be understandable.	Privacy Universal accessibility
The General Data Protection Regulation must be strengthened and expanded.	Privacy
Enable data sharing between different social networks.	User autonomy
Prohibit surveillance of parents' communications about their children.	Privacy
Ensure the privacy of website operators.	Privacy
Prohibit the retention of data on IP connections, telephony, and locations.	Privacy
Prohibit telecommunications surveillance. Ensure privacy and encryption.	Privacy
Compensate victims of illegal communications surveillance.	Privacy
When applying Artificial Intelligence to personal data, ensure the protection of such data and the free formation of opinion in digital media.	Privacy Artificial intelligence
Legally pursue digital violence, especially against women and children.	Digital crimes Gender
Review the imprint obligation to ensure the privacy of website operators.	Privacy
La France Insoumise	
Without proposals	
The Labour Party	
Legal obligation for child protection on the internet, imposing fines on companies that fail to act against abuses online.	Child protection
Approval of a Digital Rights Charter for citizens.	Digital Rights Charter.
Unidas Podemos	
Technological sovereignty. Ensuring the right to privacy and control of personal data on the network. Promotion of open-source software. Approval of a Digital Rights Charter´s.	Privacy *Open-source software* Free access or exchange Digital Rights Charter

Más País	
Without proposals	

Bloco de Esquerda	
Without proposals	

SYRIZA	
Without proposals	

Source: Author's own work.

Finally, Table 6 displays the measures related to content control, focusing not on media structures but on promoting inclusive discourse or preventing and penalizing hate speech. *Más País* is a party that has particularly oriented its program towards these types of measures, which are especially controversial and contentious (regardless of their effectiveness) within the prevailing liberal media management paradigm.

Table 6: *Summary of measures in the "content control" block by parties.*

Programmatic Measure	Topics and Subtopics
Die Linke	
The diversity of sports should be reflected in the programs.	Diversity Gender equality
Transfer more areas of public broadcasting to the states in eastern Germany, with more officials from an eastern background.	Strengthening the public sector Regional rights
Strictly regulate the trade of animals on the Internet.	Animal Rights
La France Insoumise	
Without proposals.	
The Labour Party	
Prohibit gambling advertising in sports.	Gambling and betting.
Unidas Podemos	
Increase in sports coverage dedicated to women's sports, with the goal of achieving parity. Initially, the public media.	Gender equality
Más País	
Equal presence (50/50) of women's and men's sports teams in public media.	Gender equality
Combat the hypersexualization of girls in the media.	Gender equality
Appropriate news coverage of gender-based violence in the media.	Gender equality
Control of advertising for sugary beverages and foods during children's programming hours.	Health responsibility
Elimination of bullfighting broadcasts on public media.	Animal abuse
Promote responsible agro ecological consumption campaigns on RTVE.	Ecological responsibility
Promote LGTBI+ support and visibility campaigns in RTVE programming.	LGBTQ+ rights
Bloco de Esquerda	
Without Proposals	

SYRIZA	
Without Proposals	

Source: Author's own work.

Regarding research questions 2 and 3, the comparative analysis of Tables 3 to 6, presented above, will allow us to make progress in answering these questions. In relation to specific measures for each technological, industrial, and/or economic sector of mass communication, the proposed measures by each party and the levels of coordination and compatibility vary widely, as we are about to see.

4.7.1. Specific measures about public media

Regarding the reform measures proposed for the public communication sector, in addition to being one of the most prolific in terms of proposals, it is also one of the most homogeneous and compatible among the suggestions.

The most frequent measures for public media are related to:

- Defense and strengthening of public service, preserving its autonomy, independence, transparency, technological renewal, and financial sustainability, while increasing its reach, accessibility, and offerings.
- Utilization of the public sector as a driver of cultural innovation, labor rights, and user rights, through internal and external production and its relationship with third-party companies in the sector.
- Defense of labor rights for public sector workers.
- Selection of public media leadership through public competition.
- Participation in management by workers and users.

Among the divergences in this sector, it can be observed that only in Spain do the left-leaning parties dare to propose measures that are traditionally known as "content control." These measures are typically met with resistance among professionals in the fields of culture and information, as the resulting laws would be aimed at establishing visibility quotas and replacing editorial or professional ethical criteria. For instance, increasing sports coverage dedicated to women's sports to achieve gender parity, as proposed by *Unidas Podemos*. In addition to this measure, *Más País* adds three others in the same vein: 1) eliminating broadcasts of bullfighting on public media; 2) promoting campaigns for responsible agro ecological consumption on RTVE; and 3) encouraging LGBTQ+ support and visibility campaigns on RTVE. Some academics and professionals believe that such legitimate objectives are better achieved through structural reforms (such as involving civil society in management and decision-making bodies, or achieving gender parity in decision-making positions, for example) and/or through awareness campaigns rather than content legislation. This invariably triggers reactions from professional sectors, as evidenced by countless examples worldwide throughout history (Álvarez-Peralta, 2020, pp. 251-254).

4.7.2. Specific measures about private media

Regarding the private sector, as expected, the programmatic proposals of different parties differ much more widely. Traditionally, regulating this sector has been a true political taboo after half a century of neoliberal paradigm hegemony, which can be summarized in the well-known maxim of "the best regulation is the one that doesn't exist." However, regulating this sector is necessary, just like any other. In fact, all countries have various communication laws in place that they have recently had to extensively reform to adapt to rapid technological changes, fiscal imbalances, and ethical-legal dilemmas imposed by new technologies.

For instance, the German party *Die Linke*, with a strong communist component, explicitly and repeatedly breaks this taboo with proposals not present in any other program, such as "workers' participation in the boards of media companies" or "fight against fake news." Beyond that, the *Podemos* program goes so far as to openly propose "Prohibiting banks and funds from owning media outlets" (the only measure included in its program for this sector, a measure that today in Spain would directly and severely affect all high-audience commercial radios and television stations, forcing them to reform their ownership structure). The Labour Party or Bloco, while sharing several measures with *Die Linke*, soften the tone of their proposals and complement them with less interventionist measures, such as "support for local" or community media. On the other end of the spectrum, forces like *La France Insoumise*, *Syriza*, or *Más País* embrace the classic taboo by not including any specific reform measures targeted at this sector. Only the latter party proposes two non-structural content-related measures, again related to gender equality: 1) fighting against the hypersexualization of girls in the media; and 2) appropriate media coverage of gender-based violence.

Regarding the pro-equality measures analyzed in this and the previous points, it seems that the wave of feminist, social, and institutional mobilization has been so powerful in recent years in Spain that it's one of the few that has broken the taboo of content regulation, which until a few years ago was hardly discussable programmatically, even in public media, let alone private media.

For this sector, however, we also find potential programmatic agreements (more or less explicit and evident) among the different forces, in proposals such as:

- Establishment/strengthening of a communication authority with citizen participation.
- Effective combating (through various mechanisms) of oligopolistic concentration.
- Support and enhancement of conditions that enable editorial independence and media pluralism.

4.7.3.   Specific measures about community or third-sector media

Historically, and surprisingly to the academic realm, the great overlooked aspect in the programs of left-wing parties is the nonprofit media sector: community, associative, participatory, managed by NGOs, and so on. This is surprising considering the numerous instances in which influential international institutions like UNESCO have emphasized the literacy and communicational dynamism roles played by this sector, often ensuring factors like pluralism, independence, and participation. This gap contrasts with the long history that this type of media has in countries such as Spain, France, or Greece, especially in the case of "free radios," and increasingly with television and multimedia broadcasting via the internet. It also contrasts with the need for updating and improvement evident in the de facto legal frameworks in different countries.

However, only two forces address this matter: *Die Linke* (promoting alternative funding and organizational models to the current shareholder-based and advertising-dependent model) and *Más País* (promotion of community media). In the others, this sector remains invisible, generating one of the most concerning programmatic absences from the standpoint of advocating for democratizing communication reform in favor of participation, pluralism, and social justice.

4.7.4.   Missing measures: television, radio, OTT (Over-The-Top), and radio spectrum

But this isn't the only programmatic gap exhibited by the analyzed European left-wing forces. Judging from the programs of these parties, it would seem that economic and industrial sectors such as radio, television, or Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms like Netflix, Spotify, or YouTube are not facing urgent regulatory dilemmas of absolute political priority. However, these sectors not only involve direct interests of multiple professional and social sectors but also have a significant indirect economic impact on many other industrial sectors, arts, culture, and carry serious risks to national sovereignty and the democratic process. The same applies to radio spectrum management, which appears to be free of significant issues and exceptional opportunities, especially with the advent of 5G and new technological possibilities for multiplexing and compressing multimedia digital broadcasts.

However, it's widely known that this is not the case. In reality, national parliaments have been engaged in intense debates in recent years on how to legally accommodate the latest technological developments, ongoing communicational practices, or necessary tax reforms to ensure sustainability and pluralism in a rapidly changing context. National and European regulators periodically face the need to establish new boundaries, measurements, strategic decisions, and safeguarding mechanisms in a field where regulations often lag behind practice in terms of integrating new technological possibilities. Decisions such as harmonizing digital radio systems like DAB and DAB+, creating Open Channels (following the Nordic model to utilize higher transmission capacities of the same radio spectrum), assigning frequencies for 5G and new types of broadcasts, taxation for platforms based in tax havens that cater to European audiences, combating "pirate" or irregular massive broadcasting by profit-seeking commercial actors (not only on radio but now also on digital terrestrial television), where in countries like Spain, significant revenue is generated from gambling or pseudoscience products during children's programming hours. These are just a few politically relevant and socially recognized examples.

The list of urgent and high-impact threats and opportunities provided by the current context could be the subject of specific research, but it's undoubtedly extensive and diverse. This leads us to conclude that this common programmatic silence constitutes, at the very least, a missed opportunity (if not a Achilles' heel) in the transformative capacity of the analyzed left-wing parties. The problem with programmatic gaps is that they tend to be filled by opponents or the inertia of the dominant doctrine, and in this specific field, which constructs all other domains of the political-cultural battlefield, this has an amplified impact.

4.7.5. Specific measures about the press (digital and print) and the journalism profession

When it comes to the regulation of the press and journalistic activities, we encounter the same taboo and traditional "common sense" as in the case of private media. Both among business owners and workers, there is a fairly widespread rejection of almost any regulatory political interference affecting their activities, except perhaps for some subsidies and assistance. It makes sense that the same taboo exists as in the regulation of private media and is perhaps even stronger: public or community press has had much less history, except for very exceptional examples. Unlike the audiovisual field, these entities don't compete for access to a scarce common good that necessarily needs to be regulated, such as the radio spectrum.

However, in this case, we find some shared measures, precisely because of the taboo, formulated in similar terms, always as support and empowerment of the professional rather than as limitation or prohibition: protecting the journalist and their independence and freedom of expression against external and internal attacks or pressures (including measures to "combat state espionage" or guarantee the right to professional silence not to reveal sources, etc.). This is present, in different versions and specificities, in the programs of *Die Linke*, The Labour Party, and *La France Insoumise*. Other measures present in more than one program promise to protect journalists' copyright while harmonizing it with users' rights, facilitating their access to information. However, neither of the Spanish forces analyzed here proposes any measure in this area.

As could be expected, based on the well-known theoretical model of Hallin and Mancini (2004), parties originating from cultures with a stronger Anglo-Saxon component, such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, openly address the regulation of the press, while those from Mediterranean countries (Spain and Portugal) abstain from addressing the topic. Among other factors, this is due to the direct connection between the press system and the party system in the paradigm of polarized pluralism.

4.7.6. Specific measures about access to communication and culture

This is one of the prolific and diverse areas in programmatic proposals, where we find a broadly shared axis of work in a general sense. However, the specific "implementation" of each case has compatible but very different formulations in each country: ensuring access to culturally relevant goods or public production and combating digital exclusion and other communication gaps (with a particular interest in national cultural heritage and archival material through digitization, etc.).

Beyond this measure, other programmatic developments vary widely from one party to another, including, in some cases, structural aspects such as combating monopolistic control in sectors of the audiovisual cultural industries through the creation of a public distribution entity (*Bloco de Esquerda*). In other cases, these developments lead to more contingent measures.

4.7.7. Measures related to the Internet, ISPs (Internet Service Providers), or social media

It's notable how different parties approach the fight against monopolies in various sectors separately and not in others. While *Die Linke* does so in relation to private media, and *Bloco de Esquerda* in relation to film distribution, The Labour Party addresses it somewhat ambiguously as "tackling the monopoly of tech giants over advertising revenue," without specifying further what is meant by "tech giants," but clearly referring to platforms like Google or Facebook.

In this context, two major cross-cutting axes stand out for their universality, beyond the anecdotal or contingent measures put forward by each party: 1) ensuring free and equitable universal access to the Internet, with a special emphasis on rural areas and populations at risk of digital exclusion; and 2) combating any potential censorship, discrimination, blocking, or access limitation. Between these two axes, there are more or less explicit variations, such as support for open-source software, communication secrecy, privacy, the development of fiber optics and 4G, the establishment of public distribution and access companies, local open WiFi, protection of vulnerable populations (against cyberbullying, etc.), media literacy, and more.

In this field, the level of detail and development in Die Linke 's program is notable, encompassing a range of very specific and precise programmatic measures related to the fight for digital rights.

4.7.8. Other proposals

Each party presents some innovative or challenging measures that may not fit neatly into the taxonomies presented so far (the apriori taxonomy, defined by research questions, and our inductive taxonomy, derived from the analysis).

Among these, the most commonly shared measures would be those related to media literacy (through formal and non-formal education campaigns) and technological training (for vulnerable populations such as children, women, the elderly, or refugees), as well as consumer protection and child protection measures (against advertising for gambling, sugary drinks, etc.).

4.8. Divergences and incompatibilities

In the previous section, we have seen the compatibilities and widely shared axes among the different left-wing forces and the potential for a common programmatic framework articulated among all of them. This way, we address the response to the third research question, which is central to the study at hand.

The progressive creation of a more common programmatic framework would allow these formations to join forces to undertake more significant projects involving research, experimentation through pilot projects (such as the four-day workweek trial implemented in Spain during the current legislative term), exposing rights violations, and highlighting injustices, among other actions. This has happened in other areas such as labor rights, ecological and environmental concerns, or specific gender equality demands. In the medium and long term, these types of collaborations enable synergies in data production, argumentation, and social awareness, as well as the cultural impact that often precedes the parliamentary approval of new regulations. They would amplify not only the resonance of programmatic proposals, which could progressively be adopted by other political forces or by civil society, the academic sphere, etc., but also the exposure of rights violations or injustices associated with these proposals. This would increasingly make it difficult for benefiting elites to maintain certain antidemocratic or discriminatory practices and to ignore dissenting voices. As the logic behind these efforts

becomes internationalized, these voices will significantly increase in power, and achievements in one country are more likely to spread to others or achieve irreversibility, as has already happened in other fields.

However, for progress towards a common (or widely shared) programmatic framework among the left-wing forces in Europe, as important as identifying current and potential convergences is the reflection on the distances and divergences, especially regarding their potential incompatibilities.

In this regard, and in response to the third research question that we have addressed, we must point out the following as the main divergences or inconsistencies within this discursive space:

- The different stance of each party towards classical taboos in the political economy of communication, information, and culture, such as the regulation of the journalism profession, the radio spectrum, and private media.

- Emerging new taboos, such as the regulation of Over the Top (OTT) platforms like YouTube or Spotify.

- The absence of reference or innovative measures aimed at integrating technological innovations and new communication practices into sectors such as radio, digital and terrestrial television, and digital social networks.

- The concerning almost complete lack of proposals regarding a natural and strategic ally, such as the non-profit community media sector.

- The varying orientation of measures, combined with different styles of formulation, where in certain party cultures they tend to be expressed as more substantial structural reforms (*La France Insoumise*, *Die Linke*, The Labour Party, or *Bloco de Esquerda*), while in others they appear more as superficial content-based measures (*Unidas Podemos* and especially *Más País*).

- The total absence of media-related programmatic proposals from the only left-wing force among them that has formed a government on its own (and thus has often served as a reference for the others, especially in the Mediterranean region): *Syriza*.

5.   Discussion and Conclusions

After the conducted analysis, it's worth asking whether these various European left-wing forces can learn from each other or coordinate their efforts and roadmaps. Given that this study originates from Spain, it's particularly interesting to inquire what the Spanish left can learn from the proposals of these other European parties and which of these proposals could potentially be applicable in our country. Formulating programmatic measures is not the focus of research like this, as it requires considering situational strategic aspects related to other forces, the political and parliamentary climate, the relationship with the media, the need to build a distinct image, prevailing leaderships, etc. – factors that depend on each specific party and electoral process. Moreover, it necessitates a customized legal and economic study for each proposed measure. We're fully aware that a program is not only a wish list of government actions and a statement of intentions, but also a tactical tool for cultural and political intervention, aligning with various medium and long-term strategies. However, this perspective goes beyond the scope of this research.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate to highlight, in a critical assessment, some of the missing measures that are perfectly compatible with the rest of the programmatic framework of the Spanish left, as well as their main deficits and blind spots. In this regard, the potential amendments detected here for their media reform programs should include:

- Strategic and prioritized attention to the specific demands of the third sector of communication, which is currently largely overlooked. Specifically, the demands for stable and legally secure access to the radio spectrum and for economic support without compromising their independence.

*Towards the democratization of the European media
system: a comparative analysis of media reform programs
in the alternative left*

- Consideration of technological challenges as well as spectrum management posed by the widespread adoption of technologies such as 5G, DAB, DAB+, or Over The Top platforms. The stabilization of these technologies is critical for various and important economic sectors and should not remain a blind spot in the programmatic framework.

- Reevaluation of measures related to content control and their potential transformation into structural reforms. Such reforms might be less easily dismissed from the standpoint of the still dominant neoliberal political ideology and could be geared towards achieving irreversible progress, following the example of other left-wing parties in Europe.

In conclusion, of the three hypotheses we initially set out, the first one has been largely contradicted and discarded: there is indeed a widely shared programmatic framework among the main critical or alternative left-wing forces in Europe, as we have seen in the previous sections. The evidence for this hypothesis lies in the existence of up to 5 common thematic axes for over 50% of the analyzed political forces, as detailed in section 4.4 (see above).

However, according to the analysis presented in the various sub-sections of the previous section 4, the remaining hypotheses have been partially or fully validated: a) significant programmatic gaps exist regarding media regulation (evidence: absence of dedicated space for highlighting the media reform program in over 50% of the analyzed forces, complete absence of proposed measures in the program of the only force that has managed to form a government on its own, and silence from three or more forces in at least two of the identified relevant thematic axes, see Table 5 and Table 6); b) these programmatic silences or "blind spots" are unevenly distributed among programs, affecting different sub-themes or political axes (especially "Digital Rights" and "Content Control"). Some of them, however, are widely shared (such as "Right to Culture and Information" and "Media Democratization"), so this hypothesis is only partially validated; c) programmatic differences generally relate to these gaps, different prioritizations and styles of formulation, and various points of interest, rather than deep or structural incompatibilities between their demands or analyses.

The absence of contradictory or incompatible orientations, or proposals that would collide with each other in the European legal framework, and the observation of numerous complementary proposals, constitute evidence for the hypothesis (validated) that there is indeed a possibility to articulate a shared and common media reform program among transformative left-wing forces that act as references in the European political space. This involves coordinating programmatic styles of formulation and synchronizing priorities resulting from shared analysis. In other words, European left-wing parties and pro-media reform movements and professional associations could benefit from explicitly outlining the implicit common programmatic framework that we have summarized and analyzed in this study. European left-wing forces have untapped potential for mutual learning when it comes to their media reform programs, such as addressing these programmatic gaps through borrowing programmatic elements and sharing innovative measures for new realities.

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