

Anti-Media Media: A Normative Approach to Media Positionality

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Partisan media gained increasing traction as debates regarding disinformation, polarization, anti-media populism, and media bias have drawn attention to the rise of nonmainstream media outlets. But what does "partisan media" mean, and is it the right framework for exploring current changes to the information environment? This article claims the term "partisan media" is lacking because (a) conceptually, it is too vague and all-embracing to serve as a useful analytical category; (b) historically, it was shaped by a U.S.-centric vision of media and society, assuming objectivity as an organizing force of journalism and a two-party political system; (c) normatively, it fails to capture the nature of media outlets that weaponize the facade of journalism against the roles assigned to media in democratic theory. Drawing on media roles literature and empirical evidence, this study proposes an alternative approach, distinguishing media from anti-media media, based on facticity, loyalty, plurality, and solidarity. The article calls to measure media organizations on their societal merits through their position on a democratic spectrum, thus offering an urgent intervention in the field.

Keywords: partisan media, disinformation, polarization, media capture, U.S.-centrism, bias

Over the past decade, academic interest in partisan media surged due to the rise of ideologically aligned media outlets, particularly in the United States (Bauer et al., 2022; Levendusky, 2013; Morris & Morris, 2022). The resonance of populist anti-media movements, often accompanied by congruent media, has also contributed to this booming subfield (Carlson et al., 2022; George et al., 2025). Some argue that "partisan media has become a defining element of the American political communication environment" and that "one of the most noted changes, when it comes to politics, concerns the expansion of partisan media" (Druckman et al., 2018, p. 99).

This growing body of literature links partisan media to disseminating misinformation (Ash et al., 2024; Weeks et al., 2021), promoting polarization (Levendusky, 2013; Martin & Yurukoglu, 2017), shaping political participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Kempen, 2007), decreasing media trust (Guess et al., 2021; Ladd, 2011), affecting voters' attitudes (Broockman & Kalla, 2025; DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), creating echo chambers (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), and influencing the agenda of decision makers and mainstream media (Nygaard, 2021; Stevens & Allen, 2017). Despite abundant empirical research, the definition of partisan media remains vague. What do we talk about when we talk about partisan media, and is it the right concept to examine polarization, echo chambers, or the circulation of misinformation?

This study contends that the term “partisan media” is too obscure and all-embracing. First, the article outlines the shortcomings of partisan media studies. Next, it draws on the roles of media in democratic societies to suggest an alternative approach to media positionality, one that distinguishes media from anti-media media (rather than partisan/legacy or alternative/mainstream). As previous research has noted, “An increasingly variegated news landscape calls for scholars to develop a richer vocabulary for distinguishing key features of partisan news outlets” (Bauer et al., 2022, p. 25). This article seeks to answer that call. Bauer et al. (2022) list three scholarly approaches to classifying media: producer-focused, audience-focused, and critical-normative. This article follows the last, focusing on normative expectations, unbound by journalists’ or audiences’ perceptions. It suggests redirecting media studies toward media positionality and democratic implications rather than bias, partisanship, and breach of objectivity.

Partisan Media and Its Shortcomings

Conceptual Problem

Most scholars who study partisan media avoid defining or distinguishing it from overlapping concepts like alternative media, advocacy journalism, political parallelism, or congruent media. Those who do, define partisan media as diverting from the objectivity norm that took hold in the United States during the 20th century (Maras, 2012; Schudson, 1981). Druckman et al. (2018) claim partisan media “eschews objectivity in favor of a particular point of view” (p. 99). Arceneaux and Johnson (2013) use the term “ideologically slanted news” (p. 227), and Levendusky (2013) argues that “partisan media are opinionated media: media that not only report the news but offer a distinct point of view on it as well” (p. 7).

However, *The Washington Post*, *Newsmax*, and 19th-century party-owned press could all fit into this broad category of “opinionated media.” Should we expect their effects on social cohesion or conspiratorial thinking to be similar? How useful is partisan media as an analytic category if it piles together media with fundamentally different commitments and norms of knowledge production and meaning-making?

The blurred definition of partisan media has several implications. First, it is difficult to consolidate the literature without an agreed definition. Second, this lack of clarity leads researchers to consider various outlets as partisan media, leading to false equivalences, inconsistent findings, and confusing conclusions. *The New York Times*, *Breitbart*, *Slate*, and *Rush Limbaugh* have all been studied as partisan media (Budak et al., 2016). While these outlets may all diverge from the traditional American model of objective journalism, they do so in distinctly different manners.

Literature on partisan media is largely U.S.-centric (Druckman et al., 2018; Kuypers, 2013; Levendusky, 2013), and thus, the most common example of false equivalences is the popular comparison of Fox News and MSNBC (e.g., Freiling et al., 2021; Lanning et al., 2021). Certain studies found that the effects of Fox and MSNBC differ, for instance: “Watching Fox News for an additional 2.5 minutes per week increases the vote share of the Republican presidential candidate,” while “the corresponding effect of watching MSNBC is an imprecise zero” (Martin & Yurukoglu, 2017, p. 2567). Do conservative and liberal audiences respond differently to partisan media, or are we simply comparing apples and oranges?

This point becomes critical when tackling disinformation. Meirick (2013), for example, found that “regular radio and news use was associated with a greater likelihood of misperception among Republicans, but not non-Republicans” (p. 49). According to Morris and Morris (2022), “Exposure to Republican partisan media did have a significant negative effect on feelings toward Hillary Clinton,” whereas “consumption of Democratic partisan television . . . had no influence on feelings toward Donald Trump” (p. 1101). While Fox News promotes a Republican agenda and MSNBC hosts tend to support Democrats, the content they feed their audiences is incompatible, despite their shared diversion from classic impartiality. Equating Fox and MSNBC might therefore obscure the substantial disparities regarding the deliberate spread of misinformation (Freiling et al., 2021), thus undermining efforts to improve the information environment.

Historical Problem

Historically, the term “partisan media” was shaped by a U.S.-centric vision of media and society (Lelkes, 2016), often presuming a set of conditions underlying the American case: a two-party system, a partisan media universe that could be easily divided into two, and a strong tradition of objectivity as an organizing force in journalism. This bias makes the body of literature difficult to apply to other contexts.

For instance, partisan media studies often assume that bias has one manifestation: conservative versus liberal. However, non-U.S. researchers reveal how limiting this assumption might be. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s prime minister, has long encouraged his close associates to purchase media outlets (Peri, 2004). In 2007, Netanyahu’s then-donor U.S. billionaire Sheldon Adelson founded *Israel Today*, a free daily that was quickly acknowledged as Netanyahu’s mouthpiece (Grossman et al., 2022). For years, the newspaper served Netanyahu’s interests to the extent that the prime minister was reportedly dictating its front-page headlines. Support for Netanyahu, however, did not necessarily translate into support for his right-wing competitors. *Israel Today* often provided negative coverage of right-wing politicians, increasing voting for Netanyahu at the expense of other right-wing parties (Grossman et al., 2022). In a multiparty system, this nuance can be significant.

Normative Problem

Normatively, the concept of partisan or opinionated media fails to capture the nature of an emerging type of media that weaponizes the facade of journalism against the roles assigned to journalism in democratic theory (Panievsky, 2025). One of the main political developments of the 2020s that warrants rethinking partisan media is the rise of populist authoritarianism, which targets the media as enemies (Carlson et al., 2022; George et al., 2025; Griffen, 2020). Populist leaders—from Trump and Orbán to Netanyahu and Modi—seek to maintain a democratic facade while curbing critical journalism (Scheppelle, 2018). Media outlets controlled by populists and their associates, and promoted by them, can mask their propaganda operations as a legitimate ideological leaning (Archer et al., 2025; Bajomi-Lázár, 2013; Balluff et al., 2024). In certain cases, the very terminology of “pluralism” and “diversity” is weaponized to obfuscate attempted media capture (Yadlin & Klein-Shagrir, 2024). Treating all types of partisan media equally, while ignoring epistemic accountability and drivers of bias, might play into the hands of such attempted media takeovers (Wright et al., 2024).

Furthermore, media with openly declared ideological convictions can still adhere to fact-based reporting and fulfill their democratic vocation. While overlapping, the problem with new types of antidemocratic media lies not with ideological leanings, reporting bias, or lack of detached tone, but rather with the lies, conspiracy theories, hate speech, corruption, and manipulation. The classification of media positionality below proposes to redirect researchers, practitioners, and policy makers away from liberal/conservative, left/right, or partisan/mainstream media to distinguishing between media and anti-media media.

Classifying Media

Two decades ago, Entman (2005) developed a classification of U.S. news into four categories (traditional, advocacy, tabloid, and entertainment), based on five criteria: commitment to key journalistic standards, core organizational values and missions, target analysis and market constraints, prototypical message content, and performance of news functions. Entman's typology considers audiences, content, professionalism, and ownership, usefully approaching these criteria as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. It allows differentiating partisan media like *The New York Times* ("traditional") and *The O'Reilly Factor* ("tabloid"). Several developments require updating Entman's useful typology. For example, journalistic norms are not homogenous and vary among cultures and times (Waisbord, 2013, p. 228), while declared "organizational values" sometimes differ from those practiced. What counts as "traditional" also varies considerably among cultures and over time. The proposed classification below zooms in on the performance of news functions from a normative perspective, seeking criteria that differentiate (flawed) news organizations from those using a journalistic facade to deliver propaganda, personality cult, or conspiracy theories.

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) seminal taxonomy of national media systems established the following criteria for political parallelism: media content, organizational connections, tendency for media personnel to be active in political life, partisanship of media audiences, and journalistic role orientations and practices. Their work has since been criticized, revised, and expanded (see Hallin & Mancini, 2011). This article integrates some of their criteria (e.g., media content and organizational connections) into broader themes (e.g., facticity and loyalty) to advance a normative classification of media positionality, accounting for the new, subversive ways in which bad-faith actors manipulate the facade of journalism to misinform, intimidate, and propagandize while enjoying the protections guaranteed by press freedom principles. Importantly, the classification below addresses media outlets rather than national media systems; as media fragmentation increases, distinguishing media outlets with different missions and consequences is particularly urgent.

The Power of Journalistic Facade

Current concerns surrounding partisan media should concentrate on the journalistic facade and its manipulative use. The journalistic facade—the "look and feel" of journalism—has developed alongside mass communication, with aesthetic and stylistic norms that associate certain gestures, wardrobe, terminology, color palettes, fonts, hairstyles, and decor with news (Broersma, 2010; Cameron, 1996). The journalistic facade is neither a monolith nor universal; it changes over time, affected by cultural and

technological shifts. Newspapers have different facades than TV programs, and yet, over time and often due to the global influence of the U.S. style of news, norms around journalistic facade consolidate across borders. Even when watching TV in a foreign language, one would likely recognize when one is watching the news.

The journalistic facade has become a powerful tool weaponized by political figures to attribute credibility through journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017) to nonjournalistic content. This is the organizing force behind phenomena like pink slime journalism (Darr, 2023) and "pseudo media" (Palau-Sampio, 2023). The large-scale manipulation of journalistic facade by political forces raises new urgency for classifying media based on their merit rather than their look or self-description (Ihlebaek & Figenschou, 2024). Often, the journalistic facade is used to smear journalists critical of the populist party, leader, or movement (Figenschou & Ihlebaek, 2019; George et al., 2025). The next section outlines an alternative approach to media positionality, which could minimize the disadvantages of previous media classifications and help distinguish newsrooms from media outlets manipulating the journalistic facade.

Alternative Approach to Media Positionality

In Curran's (2005) work on media and democracy, he summarized the traditional consensus on media roles at the time:

The media should keep people informed about public affairs so that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the processes of self-government. The media should be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining the exercise of power and protecting the public from wrongdoing. The media should also provide a platform of open debate that facilitates the formation of public opinion. In addition, the media should be the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry's views and expressing the agreed aims of society. In short, the primary democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent. (p. 120)

While both technology and politics have transformed since, accounts of media roles in society remain, with minor adaptations, loyal to these core ideals (Blumler & Coleman, 2015; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Theoretically, informing the public, scrutinizing the powerful, debating public life, and representing public opinion could all be delivered by opinionated as well as impartial media. There is no inherent clash between truth and declared ideological leaning. Hence, partisanship and bias may not be the optimal lens for studying media positionality. This article proposes a spectrum of media positionality instead, based on the following criteria: facticity, loyalty, plurality, and solidarity (see Table 1).

Facticity

What is the outlet's approach to verifiable facts, misinformation, and conspiracy theories? Are there practices of verification/corroborator in place? Does it sanction stories that are exposed as false? Are there correction policies when errors are made?

Facticity is a primary criterion for studying media positionality, stemming from the media's informing role (Curran & Redden, 2025). While journalism's informative role is rarely contested, in practice, various outlets misinform their audiences (Palau-Sampio, 2023). Spreading misinformation—as learned during COVID-19—can be fatal, not just for public knowledge but also for public health (Ash et al., 2024). This criterion is intended to replace previous references to “professionalism” (Entman, 2005) or “journalistic role orientations” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28). Since professional norms and practices vary (Waisbord, 2013), and as populist politics highlight the dangers of epistemological relativism (Bronk & Jacoby, 2020; Coddington & Molyneux, 2024), centering facticity is essential. Any taxonomy of media must consider, apart from relative ideological positionality, media outlets' relationship with verifiable facts, scientific consensus, or baseless claims.

Identifying news organizations' approaches to disinformation may be challenging. Like Entman's (2005) typology, it constitutes a spectrum rather than binaries. Different sections of the same outlet may demonstrate varying approaches to fact-based reporting. However, without assessing the epistemological grounds of media, the field risks becoming irrelevant. Some media bias measures have already taken steps in this direction, trying to map the U.S. media's ideological bias as well as “reliability” (e.g., Ad Fontes). Such resources should be further developed to include both non-U.S. media and the following positionality criteria.

Loyalty

Who is the subject of the outlet's loyalty? Is it leaning toward an ideology, a cause, a politician, or a party? What type of commitment drives this loyalty?

This second criterion stems from the media's watchdog role (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). Critical approach to power is vital to fulfill this much-prided role, whether through adversarial interviewing, fact-checking, or investigative reporting. According to Oxford Research Encyclopedia, “Political parallelism refers to a pattern of relationship in which given media organizations systematically echo the views and agenda of particular political groups” (Albuquerque, 2018, p. 1). Measuring media positionality requires asking: Which groups, individuals, or ideas is the outlet loyal to? Why? How transparent is this loyalty?

As explained above, media loyalties can be more complex and nuanced than “liberal” versus “conservative.” Even in a two-party system, media loyalties can be dynamic, as Fox News's tumultuous relationship with Trump illustrates (Bauer et al., 2022). While Fox's right-wing leaning is stable, the sentiment toward Trump and MAGA has changed over time.

Advancing a particular cause is different from swearing allegiance to an individual leader. Overtly ideological media can have important roles within democratic societies, while media dedicated to an individual risks deteriorating into corruption, clientelism, or breach of campaign finance laws. Which type of commitment lies behind the outlet's loyalty? Does it stem from a shared political vision, formal institutional links, commercial incentives, or outright corruption? Media commitment can be institutional (official party ties), ideological (alignment of values), clientelist (reciprocal), or commercial (audience-oriented). Each carries distinct risks for aspiring democracies.

Haaretz, for example, is an openly liberal-leaning, elitist, and adversarial broadsheet in Israel. While its news reporting adheres to professional practices like fact-checking and investigative reporting, its opinion section is left-leaning. Unlike *Israel Today*, the newspaper's loyalty is not bound to a politician or party, but rather to a clearly stated ideology (opposing the Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank). Due to these media loyalties and commitments, the societal effects of *Haaretz* and *Israel Today* are likely to differ. This type of nuance is missed by the broad concept of "partisan media," but captured by the media positionality scale.

The simplest case of loyalty occurs when media outlets are officially owned by parties, which Hallin and Mancini (2004) call "organizational connections." Its bluntest format is direct media ownership: Silvio Berlusconi famously owned Italian media outlets while serving as a politician (Statham, 1996), and in the Czech Republic, media group Mafra was owned by Andrej Babiš, who in 2017 was elected prime minister (Kotissova & Císařová, 2023).

However, partisan affiliation is often disguised more wisely in the 2020s. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, famously encouraged friendly billionaires to purchase Hungarian media outlets (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013; Griffen, 2020). In most countries, it would be impossible for media moguls to pay politicians directly, but in the United Kingdom, politicians can work anywhere, including in the news industry. Newspapers and TV channels pay serving politicians for hosting programs or writing op-eds. In 2024, Reform Party leader Nigel Farage reportedly received around £1m from far-right TV channel GB News (Mason & Dyer, 2024). Thus, while the Reform Party does not officially own GB News, exploring such unofficial loyalties is critical.

Transparency is another important factor when evaluating loyalty. Unlike recurring attempts to measure media bias (Budak et al., 2016; Castro, 2021), transparency of bias has not received much attention. Knowing whether one's news source is bound to a party or an idea can be helpful for audiences, both when selecting news sources and when assessing them.

While detecting media loyalty can be challenging, in certain cases, sufficient evidence exists to indicate that loyalty is based on a reciprocal—or even criminal—relationship. Netanyahu is currently standing trial on two corruption scandals exploring his alleged attempts to grant regulatory benefits to media owners in exchange for positive coverage (Panievsky, 2025). In Austria, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has reportedly been paying journalists in exchange for better news coverage and was investigated for bribery in a scandal dubbed "journalism for sale" (Balluff et al., 2024, p. 91). In Hungary, most media outlets have been purchased by pro-government actors (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013; Griffen, 2020). As anti-media populists sharpen their approach to media capture, detecting these loyalties is urgent (Dragomir & Aslama Horowitz, 2021). Instead of bias-centrism, researchers should develop solutions for determining which type of loyalty drives media positionality, based on publicly available knowledge like investigative reporting and legal records.

Plurality

Is there a space for counterviews toward the outlet's source of loyalty? How are political allies and rivals approached?

The plurality criterion is intended to distinguish between news outlets that nurture epistemic echo chambers and media organizations that, while endorsing certain causes or ideas, do not ignore opposing views and dissenting voices. This criterion stems from the media's role as a "marketplace of ideas," "a platform of open debate that facilitates the formation of public opinion" (Curran, 2005, p. 120). The "marketplace of ideas" is a dominant metaphor and influential justification for journalism in democratic-aspiring societies (Ingber, 1984, p. 1). In practice, when serving as separate echo chambers, certain media outlets offer little competition over ideas. Thus, once audiences have chosen their preferred partisan outlet, the competition over ideas ends. As Agmon (2022) points out, there are two kinds of competition: parallel and friction (pp. 17–19). While in parallel competition, each contender does its best separately, and consumers choose the best product, friction competition occurs when competitors debate, sharpening each other's arguments, generating better outcomes by challenging each other. For that to happen, competing ideas must be part of the conversation.

In their research on political talk shows, Bhat and Chadha (2023) examine the most-watched English-speaking programs in India. Against the naive promise of meaningful democratic deliberation, the TV talk shows were found to be spreading hate, religious majoritarianism, and hypernationalism, silencing opposing voices and propagating Modi's government. Interviewees who criticized pro-government views were disparaged as "traitors" and "unpatriotic." The targets were mainly Kashmiri separatists, feminists, civil rights activists, and human rights groups. "Besides skewing the public debates sharply to the Right," Bhat and Chadha (2023) conclude, "such attacks on dissenting panelists preclude the creation of a level-playing field for an open exchange of ideas" (p. 256).

Little space for counterviews locates media outlets closer to propaganda operations, defined as a "deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 7). Because of the societal implications of media becoming propaganda vehicles (Balint, 2021; Bard, 2017; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), space for counterviews should be considered central when examining media positionality.

Solidarity

What is the outlet's approach to hate speech? Does it amplify or challenge incitement? Does it promote diverse representation and social inclusion?

The next criterion of media positionality stems from the media's role in advancing social cohesion, facilitating collective meaning-making, and establishing imagined communities (Anderson, 1983; Carey, 1989). As Curran (2005) puts it, "There are . . . real differences of interest between social groups over how opportunity, public resources, and rewards are distributed in society. . . . These

differences should find adequate expression in media debate in order to promote equitable outcomes” (p. 126). Admittedly, the media’s role in advancing social cohesion, reinforcing moral norms, and enabling community building has traditionally received less scholarly attention than the transmission-oriented roles of informing the public and scrutinizing those in power. However, as concerns over media fragmentation go beyond epistemic fragmentation to include affective polarization, this role seems essential when tackling media positionality.

Growing evidence links partisan media to the spread of hate speech and affective polarization (Guess et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2013). Partisan media can become Petri dishes of hate against immigrants and refugees; people of color; religious/ethnic minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+); and other marginalized groups (Bell et al., 2022; Kilgo & Mourão, 2019). Media can also become a force of inclusion, recognition, and antiracism (Diercks & Landreville, 2017; Varma, 2022). Solidarity is hence determined by the outlet’s approach to inclusive representation, hate speech, and incitement to violence.

Channel 14 is an extreme example. The Israeli TV channel, originally established as the Jewish Heritage Channel, had quickly turned into a staunch pro-government tool while enjoying unparalleled regulatory favors (Panievsky, 2025). Since 2023, the channel has consistently incited violence and hate against Palestinians, Israeli hostages’ families, and left-wing protesters, proudly propagating a genocide in Gaza, smearing LGBTQ+ communities, and spreading unfounded conspiracy theories accusing activists and journalists of treason (Panievsky, 2025, p. 4). Studying Channel 14 through the notion of bias would be insufficient at best and misleading at worst.

Table 1. Criteria for Measuring Media Positionality.

Media role	Positionality	Questions	Indicative journalistic practices
Informing role	Facticity	What is the outlet’s approach to verifiable facts, unsupported claims, and conspiracy theories?	Fact-checking, corroboration, corrections, transparency
Watchdog position	Loyalty	Who is the outlet’s object of loyalty, and what drives the alignment?	Critical reporting, adversarial interviews, and investigative reporting toward the source of loyalty; public service journalism
“Marketplace of ideas”	Plurality	Is there a space for varied views toward the outlet’s source of loyalty?	Platforming political debates, interviewing various sources, providing competing (evidence-based) views
Social cohesion	Solidarity	What is the outlet’s approach to hate speech and incitement? Are there active efforts to promote	Countering hate speech, condemning racism and incitement to violence,

inclusivity?

diversifying newsrooms

Operationalizing Media Positionality: Media on the Democratic Spectrum

Certain criteria for media positionality, such as facticity and solidarity, could be addressed using content analyses and, in the future, perhaps even LLM-assisted content analyses (Fasching & Lelkes, 2025; Giorgi et al., 2025). A global media positionality index, published annually, could measure randomly sampled news content of various media outlets worldwide, ranking them on the democratic spectrum accordingly (see Table 2).

The loyalty criterion is more difficult to capture and requires drawing on investigative reporting (e.g., content analysis of *Israel Today* will not expose that Adelson established the paper for Netanyahu; this requires investigative reporting and legal protocols). Hence, this article suggests a simpler path to redirect media scholarship and public discussion away from partisanship and bias toward positionality vis-à-vis democracy: international expert surveys.

A regular survey of local experts would rank the big media organizations in the country based on the proposed criteria, on a spectrum of 1–5. Beyond correcting the current fixation with bias and partisanship, a media positionality index could incentivize news organizations, particularly those with good faith that occasionally get sloppy, to improve their ranking. To encourage a global prodemocratic media environment that takes media roles seriously, this next step is essential.

Table 2. Media Outlets on the Democratic Spectrum.

	1	2	3	4	5
Facticity	(factual, accurate)	(generally reliable)	(mixed, unclear)	(generally unreliable)	(conspiratorial)
Loyalty	(public-oriented, not affiliated with any particular source of loyalty)	(public-oriented, but openly aligned with certain causes/ideas)	(unclear loyalties, challenged editorial independence)	(indirect media capture, ownership by political associates or otherwise subjugated)	(direct party ownership, official political or commercial subjugation)
Plurality	(broad range of counterviews, adversarial journalism, and investigative reporting)	(generally varied)	(little space for variety and plurality of opinions and views)	(mainly speaks in one voice)	(total subjugation to the source of loyalty)

Solidarity	1	2	3	4	5
	(no tolerance for hate speech, racism, or incitement; representation and inclusion of various groups)	(generally inclusive)	(mixed/unclear approach to hate and pluralism)	(generally hateful)	(consistently spreading hate speech; exclusion of voices and lack of newsroom diversity)

Conclusion: From Partisan Media to Anti-Media Media

“Partisan media” is a significant yet ill-defined term for researching media and society in the 2020s (Bard, 2017; Bauer et al., 2022; George et al., 2025). As populist leaders mask their propaganda operations by conflating types of nontraditional media outlets, masquerading clientelist aspirations and media capture as mere ideological affinity and pluralism, media positionality could help us redirect and globalize future research.

This article lays the groundwork for a more granular, updated classification of media, based on the literature on media roles and organized around the criteria of facticity, loyalty, plurality, and solidarity. These categories might complicate the empirical process, yet they are necessary to prevent false equivalences and to foster more rigorous, global research on media, politics, and society.

This mission is not for one researcher to complete. In recent decades, several taxonomies of media bias were developed and tested (e.g., Castro, 2021; Groeling, 2013). However, from a normative perspective, bias is not the source of concern that scholars seek to address (disinformation, hate speech, echo chambers). New tools are required for the field to go beyond current limitations. Moreover, current media bias classifications cover almost exclusively English-speaking U.S.-based media (e.g., Ad Fontes, All Slides). To properly investigate media positionality across borders, going beyond partisanship to explore facticity, solidarity, loyalty, and plurality is essential.

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